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CORLEONE



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A TALE OF SICILY

BY

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ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

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CORLEONE

CHAPTER XXI

VITTORIA D'ORIANI had very few companions. Corona Saracinesca really liked her, for her own sake, and was sorry for her because she belonged to the family which was so often described as the worst blood in Italy. Corona and San Giacinto's wife had together presented the Corleone tribe in Roman society, but they were both women of middle age, without daughters who might have been friends for Vittoria. On the other hand, though the Romans had accepted the family on the endorsement, as it were, of the whole Saracinesca family, there was a certain general disinclination to become intimate with them, due to the posthumous influence of their dead uncle, Corleone of evil fame. The Campodonico people were unwilling to have anything to do with them, even to the gentle and charitable Donna Francesca, who had been a Braccio, and might therefore, perhaps, have been expected to condone a great many shortcomings in other families. Pietro Ghisleri, who generally spent the win-

ter in Rome, refused to know the d'Oriani, for poor dead Bianca Corleone's sake; and his English wife, who knew the old story, thought he was right. The great majority of the Romans received them, however, very much as they would have received foreigners who had what is called a right to be in society, with civility, but not with enthusiasm.

Vittoria had, therefore, met many Roman girls of her own age during the spring, but had not become intimate with any of them. It was natural that when her brother made the acquaintance of Mrs. and Miss Slayback, and when the young American took what is usually described in appalling English as a violent fancy to Vittoria, the latter should feel that sort of gratitude which sometimes expands into friendship.

They saw much of each other. It is needless to say that they had not an idea in common, and it would have been very surprising if they had. But on the other hand they had that sort of community of feeling which is a better foundation for intimacy than a similarity of ideas.

Miss Lizzie Slayback was not profound, but she was genuine. She had no inherited tendency to feel profound emotions nor to get into tragic situations, but she was full of innocent sentiment. Like many persons who do not lead romantic lives, she was in love with romance, and she believed that romance had a sort of perpetual existence

somewhere, so that by taking some pains one could really find it and live in it. Her fortune would be useful in the search, although it was unromantic to be rich. She had not read 'Montecristo,' because she was told that Dumas was old-fashioned. She was not very gifted, but she was very clever in detail. She did not understand Tebaldo in the least, for she was no judge of human nature, but she knew perfectly well how to keep him at arm's length until she had decided to marry him. She was absolutely innocent, yet she had also the most absolute assurance, and bore herself in society with the independence of a married woman of thirty.

"It is our custom in my country," she said to Vittoria, who was sometimes startled by her friend's indifference to the smaller conventionalities.

The two young girls spoke French together, and understood each other, though a third person might not at first have known that they were speaking the same language. Vittoria spoke the French of an Italian convent, old-fashioned, stilted, pronounced with the rolling southern accent which only her beautiful voice could make bearable, and more or less wild as to gender. Lizzie Slayback, as has been said, spoke fluently and often said the same things because she had a small choice of language. Occasionally she used phrases that would have made a Frenchman's hair feel uneasy on his head, and her

innocent use of which inspired disquieting doubts as to the previous existence of the person who had taught her.

"We think," she said, "that it is better to enjoy yourself while you are young, and be good when you grow old, but in Europe it seems to be the other way."

"No one can be good all the time," answered Vittoria. "One is good a little and one is bad a little, by turns, just as one can."

"That makes a variety," said Miss Slayback. "That is why you Italians are so romantic."

"I never can understand what you mean by romantic," observed Vittoria.

"Oh — everything you do is romantic, my dear. Your brother is the most romantic man I ever saw. That is why I think I shall marry him," she added, as though contemplating a new hat with a view to buying it, and almost sure that it would suit her.

"I do not think you will be happy with him," said Vittoria, rather timidly.

"Because he is romantic, and I am not? Well, I am not sure."

"There! You use the word again! What in the world do you mean by it?"

Miss Slayback was at a loss to furnish the required definition, especially in French.

"Your brother is romantic," she said, repeat-

ing herself. "I am sure he looks like Cæsar Borgia."

"I hope not!" exclaimed Vittoria. "Surely you would not marry—" she stopped.

"Cæsar Borgia?" enquired Lizzie Slayback, calmly. "Of all people, I should have liked to marry him! He was nice and wicked. He would never have been dull, even nowadays, when everybody is so proper, you know."

"No," laughed the Italian girl, "I do not think anybody would have called him dull. He generally murdered his friends before they were bored by his company."

Miss Lizzie laughed, for Vittoria seemed witty to her.

"If I had said that at a party," she answered, "everybody would have told me that I was so clever! I wish I had thought of it. May I say it, as if it were mine? Shall you not mind?"

"Why should I? I should certainly not say it myself, before people."

"Why not?"

"It would not be thought exactly—oh—what shall I say? We young girls are never expected to say anything like that. We look down, and hold our tongues."

"And think of all the sharp things you will say when you are married! That is just the difference. Now, in the West, where I come from, if a girl has

anything clever to say, she says it, even if she is only ten years old. I must say, it seems to me much more sensible."

"Yes — but there are other things, besides being sensible," objected Vittoria.

"Then they must be senseless," retorted Miss Lizzie. "It follows."

"There are all sorts of customs and traditions in society that have not very much sense perhaps, but we are all used to them, and should feel uncomfortable without them. When the nuns taught me to do this, or that, to say certain things, and not to say certain other things, it was because all the other young girls I should meet would be sure to act in just the same way, and if I did not act as they do, I should make myself conspicuous."

"I never could see the harm in being conspicuous," said Miss Slayback. "Provided one is not vulgar," she added, by way of limitation.

"Do you not feel uncomfortable, when you feel that everyone is looking at you?"

"No, of course not, unless I am doing something ridiculous. I rather like to have people look at me. That makes me feel satisfied with myself."

"It always makes me feel dreadfully uncomfortable," said Vittoria.

"It should not, for you are beautiful, my dear. You really are. I only think I am, when I have good clothes and am not sunburnt or anything like

that—I never really believe it, you know. But when people admire me, it helps the illusion. I wish I were beautiful, like you, Vittoria.”

“I am not beautiful,” said the Sicilian girl, colouring a little shyly. “But I wish I had your calmness. I am always blushing—it is so uncomfortable—or else I am very pale, and then I feel cold, as though my heart were going to stop beating. I think I should faint if I were to do the things you sometimes do.”

“What, for instance?” laughed the American girl.

“Oh—I have seen you cross a ballroom alone, and drive alone in an open carriage—”

“What could happen to me in a carriage?”

“It is not that—it is—I hardly know! It is like a married woman.”

“I shall be married some day, so I may as well get into the habit of it,” observed Miss Lizzie, smiling and showing her beautiful teeth.

In spite of such inconclusive conversations, the two girls were really fond of each other. When Mrs. Slayback looked at Tebaldo’s sharp features, her heart hardened; but when she looked at Vittoria, it softened again. She was a very intelligent woman, in her way, and, having originally married for his money a man whom she considered beneath her in social standing and cultivation, she wished to improve his family in her own and her friends’

eyes by making a brilliant foreign marriage for his niece. 'Princess of Corleone' sounded a good deal better than 'Miss Lizzie Slayback,' and there was no denying the antiquity and validity of the title. There were few to be had as good as that, for the girl's religion was a terrible obstacle to her marrying the heir of any great house in Europe in which money was not a paramount necessity. But Tebaldo assured her that he attached no importance whatever to such matters. Lizzie was in love with him, and he took pains to seem to be in love with her.

Mrs. Slayback did not give more weight to her niece's inclinations and fancies than Tebaldo gave to his religious scruples. The girl was highly impressionable to a very small depth, skin deep, in fact, and below the shallow gauge of her impressions she suddenly became hard and obstinate like her uncle. She had an unfortunate way of liking people very much at first sight if she chanced to meet them when she was in a good humour, and quite regardless of what they might really be. She had said to herself that Tebaldo was 'romantic,' and as his life hitherto might certainly have been well described by some such word, he had no difficulty in keeping up the illusion for her.

He saw that she listened with wonder and delight to his tales of wild doings in Sicily, and he had not the slightest difficulty in finding as many

of them to tell her as suited his purpose. He had been more intimately connected with one or two of his stories than he chose to tell her; but he was ready at turning a difficulty of that sort, and when he introduced himself he treated his own personality and actions with that artistic modesty which leaves vague beauties to the imagination. Never having had any actual experience of the rude deeds of unbridled humanity, Miss Lizzie liked revengeful people because they were 'romantic.' She liked to think of a man who could carry off his enemy's bride in the grey dawn of her wedding day, escape with her on board a ship, and be out of sight of land before night—because such deeds were 'romantic.' She liked to know that a band of thirty desperate men could bid defiance to the government and the army for months, and she loved to hear of Leone, the outlaw chief, who had killed a dozen soldiers with his own hand in twenty minutes, before he fell with twenty-seven bullets in him—that was indeed 'romantic.' And Tebaldo had seen Leone himself, many years ago, and remembered him and described him; and he had seen most of the people whose extraordinary adventures he detailed to the girl, and had known them and spoken with them, had shot with them for wagers, had drunk old wine of Etna at their weddings, and had followed some of them to their graves when they had been killed. A good many of his ac-

quaintances had been killed in various 'romantic' affairs.

Everything he told her appealed strongly to Lizzie Slayback's imagination, and he had the advantage, if it were one, of being really a great deal like the people he described, daring, unscrupulous, physically brave and revengeful, very much the type which is so often spoken of in Calabria with bated breath, as 'a desperate man of Sicily.' For the Italian of the mainland is apt both to dread and respect the stronger man of the islands.

In addition to his accomplishments as a storyteller, Tebaldo possessed the power of seeming to be very much in love, without ever saying much about it. He flattered the girl, telling her that she was beautiful and witty and charming, and everything else which she wished to be; and when his eyelids were not drooping at the corners as they did when he was angry, he had a way of gazing with intense and meaning directness into Lizzie Slayback's dark-blue eyes, so that Vittoria would no longer have envied her, for she blushed and looked away, half pleased and half disturbed.

Aliandra Basili thought Francesco much more ready and apt to anticipate her small wishes and to understand her thoughts than his brother. But when he chose to take the trouble, with cool calculation, Tebaldo knew well enough how to make a woman believe that he was taking care of her,

which is what many women most wish to feel. With Aliandra, whom he loved as much as he was capable of loving anyone, Tebaldo felt himself almost too much at his ease to disguise his own selfishness. But he gave himself endless trouble for Miss Slayback, and she was sometimes touched by little acts of his which showed how constantly she was in his mind—as indeed she was, much more than she knew.

In her moments of solitude, which were few, for she hated to be alone, she reflected more than once that her money must seem a great inducement to a poor Italian nobleman; but she was too much in love with the ‘romantic’ to believe that Tebaldo wished to marry her solely for her fortune. It was too hard to believe, when she looked at her own face in the mirror and saw how young, and pretty, and smiling she really was. Her dark lashes gave her blue eyes so much expression that she could not think herself not loved, a mere encumbrance to be taken with a fortune, but not without, in exchange for a title. She was fond of her refined but not very remarkable self, and it would have been hard to convince her that Tebaldo’s silent looks and ever-ready service meant nothing but greed of money. Very possibly, she admitted, he could not have thought of marrying her if she had been poor, but she believed it equally certain that if she had been an ugly, rich, middle-

aged old maid, he would never have thought of it either.

Besides, Tebaldo had watched with great satisfaction the growing intimacy between her and his sister, and he took care to play his comedy before Vittoria as carefully as before Miss Slayback herself. Vittoria, as he knew, was very truthful, and if her friend asked questions about him, she would repeat accurately what he had said in her presence, if she gave any information at all. To his face, Vittoria accused him of wishing to marry for money, but so long as he affirmed that he loved Miss Slayback, Vittoria would never accuse him behind his back, nor tell tales about his character which might injure his prospects. Though he knew that she rarely believed him and never trusted him, he knew that he could trust her. That fact alone might have sufficiently defined their respective characters.

CHAPTER XXII

TEBALDO had not been at all willing to believe that Aliandra Basili really meant to treat him differently after the meeting in which she had defined her position so clearly, but he soon discovered that she was in earnest. She was not a person to change her mind easily, and she had decided that it was time to end the situation in one way or the other. Tebaldo must either marry her, or cease to persecute her with his attentions. In the latter case she intended to marry Francesco.

Like most successful singers, and, indeed, like most people who succeed remarkably in any career, she possessed the extraordinary energy which ultimately makes the difference between success and failure in all struggles for preëminence. Many have the necessary talent and the other necessary gifts; few have, besides these things, the restless, untiring force to use them at all times to the extreme limit of possibility. People who have the requisite facility but not the indispensable energy find it so hard to realize this fact that they have inverted our modern use of the word 'genius' to account for their own failures. The ancients, and

even the mediævals, when beaten in a fair fight by men more enduring than themselves, were always ready to account for their defeat on the ground of a supernatural intervention against them. Similarly the people who are clever enough to succeed, nowadays, but not strong enough, nor patient enough, attribute to the man who surpasses them some sort of supernatural inspiration, which they call genius, and against which they tell themselves that it is useless to strive. Socrates called his acute sense of right and wrong his familiar spirit, his *dæmon*; but in those days of the supremacy of the greatest art the world has ever seen, or ever will see, at a time when most people still believed in oracles, no one ever attributed any such familiar spirit to Sophocles, to Praxiteles, nor to Zeuxis, nor to any other poets, sculptors, or painters. The Muses had become mere names even then, and the stories about them were but superstitious fables.

That restless energy was part of the Sicilian singer's nature. Whether her other gifts were great enough for greatness remained to be seen, and the question had nothing to do with Tebaldo Pagliuca. Her singing gave him pleasure, but it was not what chiefly attracted him. He was in love with her in a commonplace and by no means elevated way, and artistic satisfaction did not enter into his passion as a component factor. There was nothing so elevated about it.

Aliandra's very womanly nature made her vaguely aware of this, and she had a physical suspicion, so to say, that if Tebaldo ever lost his head, he would be much more violent than his brother, who had frightened her so badly one evening at the theatre. She was inclined to think that it would not be safe to irritate Tebaldo too much; yet she was sure that it was of no use to prolong the present ambiguous situation, in which she was practically accepting and authorizing the love of a man who would not marry her if he could help it.

After she had finally told him what she meant to do, nothing could move her, and she entirely refused to see him alone. Hitherto she had used her privilege as an artist in this respect, and had often sent away her worthy aunt, the Signora Barbuzzi, during his visits. But now, when he came, the black-browed, grey-haired, thin-lipped old woman kept her place beside her niece on the little green sofa of the little hired drawing-room, her withered fingers steadily knitting black silk stockings. This was her only accomplishment, but it was an unusual one, and she was very proud of it, and of her wonderful eyes, which never needed glasses, and could count the minute black stitches even when the light was beginning to fail on a winter's afternoon.

Then Tebaldo sat uneasily on his chair, and

wished the old woman might fall dead in an apoplexy, and that he had the evil eye, and by mere wishing could bring her to destruction. And Aliandra leaned back in the other corner of the sofa, behind her aunt, and smiled coolly at what Tebaldo said, and answered indifferently, and looked at her nails critically but wearily when he said nothing, as if she wished he would go away. And he generally went at the end of half an hour, unable to bear the situation much longer than that, after he had discovered that the Signora Barbuzzi was in future always to sit through his visits.

“And now, my daughter,” said the aunt one day when he had just gone, “the other will come in a quarter of an hour. The sun sets, the moon rises, as we say.”

Which invariably happened. Francesco did not like being caught with Aliandra by his brother, as has been already seen. He had, therefore, hit upon the simple plan of spying upon him, following him at a distance until he entered Aliandra's house, and then sitting in a little third-rate café opposite until he came out. Tebaldo, who was extremely particular about the places he frequented, because he wished to behave altogether like a Roman gentleman, would never have entered any such place as Francesco made use of for his own purposes. Francesco knew that, and felt perfectly safe as he sat at his little marble table,

with a glass of syrup and soda water, his eyes fixed on the big front door which he could see through the window from the place he regularly occupied. He was also quite sure that, as Tebaldo had always just left the house when he himself came, there was no danger of his elder brother's sudden appearance.

64 The Signora Barbuzzi was decidedly much more civilized than her brother, the notary of Randazzo, for she had been married to a notary of Messina, which meant that she had lived in much higher social surroundings. That, at least, was her opinion, and Aliandra was too wise to dispute with her. She had given the deceased Barbuzzi no children, and in return for her discretion he had left her a comfortable little income. Notaries are apt to marry the sisters and daughters of other notaries, and to associate with men of their own profession, for they generally have but little confidence in persons of other occupations. The Signora Barbuzzi might have been a notary herself, for she had the avidity of mind, the distrustfulness, the caution about details, and the supernormal acuteness about the intentions of other people which are the old-fashioned Italian notary's predominant characteristics. She looked like one, too.

"For my part, my daughter," she said to her niece, shaking her head twice towards the same side, as some old women frequently do when they

are knitting a stocking, "for my part, I should send them both away for the present. They will not marry, for they have no money. Who marries without money? I see that you earn a great deal, but not a fortune. If you should marry Tebaldo or Francesco, and if you should not earn the fortune you expect, you would find yourself badly off. But if you can earn ten times, twenty times what you have earned this winter during the next four or five years, then you can marry either of them, because they will want your money as well as yourself."

Aliandra said nothing for some minutes, for she saw the truth of her aunt's advice. On the other hand, she was young and felt quite sure of success, and she did not feel sure that some unexpected turn of fortune might not suddenly bring about an advantageous marriage for one of the two men.

"I am not the Patti," she said thoughtfully. "I am not the Melba. I am only the little Basili yet, but I have a remarkable voice and I can work —"

"Voices are treacherous," observed the cautious old woman. "They sometimes break down. Then you will only be the daughter of Basili the notary again."

"My voice will not break down," answered Aliandra, confidently. "It is a natural voice, and I never make any effort. My master says it is the voices

which are incomplete at first and have to be developed to equalize them, which break down sometimes."

"You may have an illness," suggested the Signora Barbuzzi. "Then you may lose your voice."

"Why should I have an illness? I am strong."

The handsome girl leaned back on the sofa and raising her arms clasped her hands behind her head, resting them against the wall—a splendidly vital figure.

"We are mortal," observed the old woman, sententiously. "When God pleases to send us a fever, goodbye voice!"

"Have I some sin on my soul that Heaven should send me a fever?" asked Aliandra, rather indignantly. "What have I done?"

"Nothing, nothing, my daughter! Who accuses you? You are an angel, you are a crystal, you are a little saint. I have said nothing. But a fever is a fever for saints and sinners."

"I am not going to have a fever, and I am not going to lose my voice. I shall make a great reputation and earn a great deal of money."

"Heaven send it you thus!" answered the Signora Barbuzzi, devoutly.

"But I shall make Tebaldo jealous of Francesco, so that he will not be able to see out of his eyes for jealousy. Then he will marry me. But if not, I will marry the other, whom I like better."

"Indeed, jealousy is a weapon, my dear. A bad mule needs a good stick, as they say. But for my part, I am a notary's daughter, the widow of a notary—may the Lord preserve him in glory!—and the sister of a notary. I am out of place as the aunt of an artist. With us we have always said, who leaves the old road to take the new, knows what he leaves but not what he shall find. That is a good proverb. But your life is on a new road. You may find fortune, but no one knows. At least, you have bread, if you fail, and you risk nothing, if you remain a good girl."

"So far as that goes!" Aliandra laughed scornfully. "My head will not turn easily."

"Thank Heaven, no. There is the other one," added the old woman, as she heard the door-bell ring. "Shall I leave you alone with him, my daughter?"

"Why should you?" asked Aliandra, indifferently. "What have I to say to him?"

She was perhaps not quite as indifferent as she seemed, for Francesco attracted her. On the other hand, she did not wish to be attracted by him so long as there was a chance of marrying the other brother, and her aunt's presence was a sort of precaution against an improbable but vaguely possible folly which she distinguished in the future.

On his part, Francesco always did his best to make a favourable impression on the Signora

Barbuzzi, considering her friendship indispensable. He fancied that it must be a comparatively easy thing to please an old chaperon who got little attention from anyone, and he used to bring her bunches of violets from time to time, which he presented with a well-turned speech. He might as well have offered a nosegay to the deceased Barbuzzi himself, for all the impression he produced by his civilities to the hard-headed, masculine old woman.

He was not discouraged, however, and though he wished her anywhere but where she was, he bore her presence with equanimity and made himself as agreeable as he could. He was far too sharp-sighted himself not to see what Aliandra was doing, but he had no means of acting upon her feelings as she was trying to act upon Tebaldo's, and he had the low sort of philosophy which often belongs to sensual people, and which is perhaps not much higher than the patience of the cat that crouches before the mouse's hole, waiting for its victim to run into danger. He was no match, however, for the two women, and he very much overestimated the attraction he exercised upon Aliandra.

It was, in a manner, a sort of disturbing influence rather than an attraction, and Aliandra avoided it until she was forced to feel it, and when she felt it, she feared it. Yet she liked him, and was sur-

prised at the contradiction, and distrusted herself in a general way. She was not much given to self-examination, and would probably not have understood what the word meant; but, like a young wild animal, she was at once aware of the presence of danger, and was tempted towards the cause of it, while her keen natural instinct of self-preservation made her draw back cautiously whenever the temptation to advance was particularly strong.

This was the situation of Aliandra with regard to the two brothers respectively. Her interest lay with the one, her inclination, so far as it was one, with the other, and she distrusted both in different ways, fearing the one that was a coward, but distrusting more the one who was the braver and more manly of the two, but also incomparably the more deceitful.

They, on their part, were both in love with her, and not in very different ways; but though Tebaldo was the bolder in character, he was the one more able to be cautious where a woman was concerned, while he was also capable of jealousy to a degree inconceivable to Francesco.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE world would go very well, but for the unforeseen. The fate of everyone in this story might have been very different if Gesualda, old Basili's maid of all work, had not stopped to eat an orange surreptitiously while she was sweeping down the stone stairs early in the morning, before the notary was dressed. She was an ugly girl, and had not many pleasures in life; Basili was old and stingy and fault-finding, and she had to do all the work of the house,—the scrubbing, the cooking, the serving, the washing, and the mending.

She did it very well; in the first place because she was strong, secondly because she was willing and sufficiently skilful, and lastly because she was very unusually ugly, and therefore had no distractions in the shape of love-making. She was also scrupulously honest and extremely careful not to waste things in the kitchen. But fruit was her weakness, and, being a Sicilian, she might have been capable of committing a crime for the sake of an orange, or a bunch of grapes, or a dozen little figs, if they had not been so plentiful that one could always have what one could eat for the mere ask-

ing. Her only shortcoming, therefore, was that she could not confine herself to eating her oranges in the kitchen. She always had one in her pocket. A cynical old lady once said that the only way to deal with temptation was to yield to it at once, and save oneself all further annoyance. Gesualda yielded to the temptation to eat the orange she had in her pocket, when she had resisted it just long enough to make the yielding a positive delight. She felt the orange through her skirt, she imagined how it looked, she thought how delicious it would be, and her lips were dry for it, and her soul longed for it. There was always a quiet corner at hand, for the notary lived alone. In an instant the orange was in her hands, her coarse fingers took the peel off in four pieces with astonishing skill, the said peel disappeared temporarily into the pocket again, and a moment later she was happy.

Her whole part in this history consisted in the eating of a single orange on the dark stone stairs, yet it was an important one, for out of all the thousands of oranges she had eaten during her life, that particular one was destined to be the first link in a long and tragic chain of circumstances.

Whether the orange was not quite ripe, so that the peel did not come away as easily as usual, or whether she was made a little nervous by the fact that her master might be expected to appear at

any moment, a fact which enhanced the delight of the misdeed, neither she herself nor anyone else will ever know. As usual, she ran her sharp, strong thumb-nail twice round the fruit, crosswise, dug her fingers into the crossing cuts thus made, and stripped the peel off in a twinkling, thrusting the four dry pieces into her pocket. And as usual, in another moment, she was perfectly, blissfully happy, for it was a blood-orange, and particularly sweet and juicy, having no pips, for it had grown on a very old tree, and those are the best, as everyone knows in the orange country of the south.

But fate tore off a tiny fragment of the peel, a mere corner of one strip, thick, and the shiny side upwards, all slippery with its aromatic oil, and placed it cunningly just on the edge of one of the worn old stone steps, above her in the dark turning. Then fate went away, and waited quietly to see what should happen, and Gesualda also went away, down to her kitchen, to begin and prepare the vegetables which she had bought at daybreak of the vendor, a little way down the street. The bit of peel lay quite quietly in the dark, doing as fate had bidden it, and waiting likewise.

Now, fate had reckoned exactly how many paces Basili the notary would take from his room to the head of the stairs, in order to know with which foot he would take the first step downwards, and hence to calculate whether the bit of peel should

be a little to the right or a little to the left. And it lay a little to the left; for the left foot, as fate is aware, is the unlucky foot, except for left-handed people. Basili was a right-handed man; and as he came downstairs in his great, flapping leathern slippers, he put the smoothest spot of the old sole exactly upon the shiny bit of peel. All of which shows the astonishing accuracy which fate can bring to bear at important moments. That was the beginning of the end of this history.

Basili fell, of course, and, as it seemed to him, he fell backwards, forwards, sideways, and upside down, all in a moment; and when he came to the bottom of the stairs, he had a broken leg. It was not a bad break, though any broken leg is bad, and the government surgeon was at home, because it was early in the morning, and came and set it very well, and Basili lay in a sunny room, with pots of carnations in the window, drinking syrup of tamarind with water, to cool his blood, and very much disturbed in his mind. Gesualda sat on the steps all the morning, moaning and beating her breast, for she had found the little piece of orange-peel, groping in the dark, and she knew that it had all been her fault. For penitence, she made a vow, at first, not to eat an orange till the master was recovered. Later in the day, she went to confession, in order to ease her soul of its burden, and she told her confessor that she could not pos-

sibly keep the vow, and that she had already twice undergone horrible temptation since the accident, at the mere sight of an orange. Thereupon the confessor, who was a wise little old man, commuted her self-imposed penance to abstinence from cheese, which she scrupulously practised for a whole month afterwards, until the notary was on his feet for the first time. But by that time a great many things had happened.

Basili lay in his sunny room, finding it difficult to understand exactly what had happened to him. He had never been ill in his life, excepting once when he had taken a little fever, as a mere boy. He was a tough man, not so old as he looked, and he had never thought it possible that he could be laid on his back and made perfectly helpless for a whole month. He had ground his teeth while they had been setting his leg, but in spite of the pain he had been thinking chiefly of the check to his business which must be the inevitable result of such a long confinement. He had a shabby little clerk who copied for him, and was not altogether stupid, but he trusted no one with the affairs of his clients, and he was a very important person in Randazzo. Moreover, a young notary from Catania had recently established himself in opposition to him, and he feared the competition.

He was very lonely, too, for the clerk, after presenting his condolences, had seized the oppor-

tunity of taking a holiday, and there was nobody but Gesualda in the house. In the afternoon she got her mother to take her place while she went to confession. Basili was very lonely indeed, for the doctor would not let him receive his clients who came on business, fearing fever for his patient. The day seemed very long. He called for paper and pen, and in spite of the surgeon's prohibition, he had himself propped up in bed, and wrote a letter to his daughter. He told her of his accident, and begged her to come to him, if she could do so without injuring the course of study she had undertaken.

Time was precious to Aliandra, for her master generally left Rome at the end of June, and she had only learned about half of *Aïda*, the opera she had undertaken to study, and which was a necessary one for her future career. But she made up her mind at once to go to her father, for a fortnight, after which time, in the ordinary course of things, he would probably be able to spare her. She was very fond of him, for her mother had died when she had been very young, and Basili had loved the child with the grim tenderness peculiar to certain stern characters; and afterwards, when once persuaded that she had both voice and talent for the stage, he had generously helped her in every way he could.

He had missed her terribly, for she had not been

in Sicily since the previous autumn, and it was natural that he should send for her to keep him company during his recovery. She, on her part, looked forward with pleasure to a taste of the old simple existence in which she had been so happy as a child. She left her maid in Rome, and her aunt stopped in Messina, intending to come up to Randazzo a few days later and pay her brother a visit.

Before leaving Rome Aliandra told both Tebaldo and Francesco where she was going, and that she intended to return in a fortnight in order to study with her teacher until he should leave Rome. She maintained her attitude of coldness towards Tebaldo to the last. He complained of it. For once, the Signora Barbuzzi had left the room unbidden, judging, no doubt, that before going away for some time Aliandra might wish to see Tebaldo alone, and possibly have some further explanation with him.

"Look here," he said roughly, "you have treated me in this way long enough, and I have borne it quietly. Be reasonable—"

"That is exactly what I am," answered Aliandra. "It is you who are unreasonable."

"Because I love you, you say that I am unreasonable!" he retorted, his patience giving way suddenly. "Because you burn me—bah! find words! I cannot. Give me your hand!"

"Only in one way. I have told you —"

"Give me your hand." He came quite close to her.

She held her hands behind her and looked at him defiantly, her head high, her eyes cold.

"If you want my hand—you must keep it," she said.

She was very handsome just then, and his heart beat faster. There was a tremor in his voice when he spoke again, and his fingers shook as he laid them lightly on her shoulder, barely touching her. There is a most tender vibration in any genuine passion under control, just before it breaks out. Aliandra saw it, but she distrusted him, and believed that he might be acting.

"I cannot bear this much longer," he said. "It is killing me."

"There is no reason why it should," she answered coldly. "You know what you have to do. I will marry you whenever you please."

He was silent. The vision of Miss Lizzie Slayback with her millions, and with all his own future, rose before him. He seemed to see it all behind the handsome head, on the ugly flowered paper of the wall. That stake was too heavy, and he could not afford to risk it. Yet, as he met Aliandra's hard eyes and cruelly set mouth, her resistance roused him as nothing ever had before.

"You hesitate still," she said scornfully. "I do not think your love will kill you."

"Yours for me will not hurt you, at all events," he answered rudely.

"Mine? Oh — you may think of that as you please."

She shrugged her shoulders like a woman of the people, and turned from him indifferently; leaving him standing near the door, growing pale by quick degrees, till his face was a faint yellow and his eyes were red.

"I believe you love my brother," he said hoarsely, as she moved away.

She stopped and turned her head, as she answered.

"His is by far the more lovable character," she said in a tone of contempt. "I should not blame any woman for preferring him to you."

"It will be better for him that you should not prefer him." His face was livid now. Aliandra laughed, and turned so that she could see him.

"Bah! I believe you are a coward after all. He need not fear you, I fancy."

"Do you really think me a coward?" asked Tebaldo, in a low voice, and his eyes began to frighten her.

"You behave like one," she answered. "You are afraid of the mere opinion of society. That is the reason why you hesitate. You say you love me,

but you really love only that you call your position."

"No," he answered, not moving. "There are other reasons. And you are mistaken about me. I am not a coward. Do not say it again. Do you understand?"

Again she shrugged her shoulders, as though to say that it mattered little to her whether he were a coward or not. But she did not like the look in his eyes, though she did not believe that he would hurt her. She had heard of his occasional terrible outbreaks of anger, but had never seen him in one of them. He was beginning to look dangerous now, she thought. She wondered whether she had gone too far, but reflected that, after all, if she meant to exasperate him into a promise of marriage, she must risk something.

"Do not make me say it," she replied, more gently than she had spoken yet.

Few feminine retorts are more irritating than that one, of which most women know the full value, but in some way it acted upon Tebaldo as a counter-irritant to his real anger.

"No," said Tebaldo, and his eyelids suddenly drooped, "you shall say something else. As you are just going away, this is hardly the moment to fix a day for our marriage."

She started slightly at the words, and looked at him. His eyes were less red, and the natural brown

colour was coming back in his cheeks. She thought the moment of danger past.

"I shall be back in a fortnight," she answered.

"There will be time enough when you come back," he said in his usual tone of voice. "Provided that you do not change your mind in the meantime," he added, with a tolerable easy smile. "Do not forget that you love Francesco." He laughed, for he was really a good actor.

She laughed, too, but uneasily, more to quiet herself than to make him think that she was in a good humour again.

"I never forget the people I love," she said lightly.

Then with a quick gesture and movement, as though wholly forgiving him, she kissed her fingers to him, laughed again, and was out of the room in a moment, leaving him where he was. He stood still for three or four seconds, looking at the door through which she had disappeared, longing for her—like a fool, as he said to himself. Then he went out.

It had been a singular parting, he thought, and if he had not been at her mercy by one side of his nature, he said to himself that he would never have spoken to such a woman again. There was a frankly cynical determination on her part to marry him, which might have repelled any man, and which, he admitted, precluded all idea of love

on her side. In spite of it all, his hand trembled when he had touched her sleeve at her shoulder, and he had not been quite able to control his voice. In spite of it all, too, he hated his brother with all his heart, far more bitterly than ever before, for what Aliandra had said of him.

Something more would have happened on that day, if he had known that Francesco was sitting in the little third-rate café opposite Aliandra's house, waiting to see him come out. He would, however, have been momentarily reassured had he further known that the Signora Barbuzzi, for diplomatic reasons, returned to the sitting-room and was present during the whole of Francesco's visit.

Aliandra left Rome the next morning. She did not care to tire herself by travelling very fast, so she slept in Naples, and did not reach Randazzo until the third day, a week after her father's accident.

CHAPTER XXIV

TEBALDO felt a sort of relief when Aliandra was gone. He missed her, and he longed for her, and yet, every time that he thought of Lizzie Slayback, he was glad that Aliandra was in Sicily. He felt more free. It was easier to bear a separation from her than to be ever in fear of her crossing the heiress's path. That, indeed, might have seemed a remote danger, considering the difference that lay between the lives of the American girl and the singer. But Miss Slayback was restless and inquisitive; she liked of all things to meet people who were 'somebody' in any department of art; she had heard of Aliandra Basili and of the sensation her appearance had created during the winter, and she was quite capable of taking a fancy to know her. Miss Lizzie generally began her acquaintance with anyone by ascertaining who the acquaintance's acquaintances might be, as Tebaldo well knew, and if at any moment she chose to know the artist, it was probable that his secret would be out in a quarter of an hour.

Then, too, he saw that he must precipitate mat-

ters, for spring was advancing into summer, and if his engagement were suddenly announced while Aliandra was in Rome, he believed that she would very probably go straight to Miss Slayback and tell her own story, being, as he could see, determined to marry him at any cost. He was therefore very glad that she was gone.

But when the hour came round at which he had been accustomed to go and see her every day, he missed her horribly, and went and shut himself up in his room. It was not a sentimentality, for he was incapable of that weak but delicate infusion of sentiment and water from which the Anglo-Saxon race derives such keen delight. It was more like a sort of physical possession, from which he could not escape, and during which he would have found it hard to be decently civil to Miss Slayback, or indeed to any other woman. At that time his whole mind and senses were filled with Aliandra, as though she had been bodily present in the room, and her handsome head and vital figure rose distinctly in his eyes, till his pulse beat fast in his throat and his lips were dry.

Two days after Aliandra's departure, Tebaldo was in this state, pacing up and down in his room and really struggling against the intense desire to drive instantly to the railway station and follow Aliandra to Sicily. Without a knock the door opened, and Francesco entered.

"What do you want?" asked Tebaldo, almost brutally, as he stopped in his walk.

"What is the matter with you?" enquired the other, in some surprise, at his brother's tone.

"What do you want, I say?" Tebaldo tapped the floor impatiently with his foot. "Why do you come here?"

"Really, you seem to be in an extraordinary frame of mind," observed Francesco. "I had no intention of disturbing you. I often come to your room —"

"No. You do not come often. Again—what do you want? Money? You generally want that. Take it—there on the table!" He pointed to a little package of the small Italian notes.

Francesco took two or three and put them carefully into his pocket-book. Tebaldo watched him, hating him more than usual for having come at that moment. He hated the back of his neck as Francesco bent down; it looked so smooth and the short hair was so curly just above his collar. He wondered whether Aliandra liked to look at the back of Francesco's neck, and his eyes grew red.

"So Aliandra has gone," observed Francesco, carelessly, as he returned the purse to his pocket and turned to his brother.

"Have you come here to tell me so?" asked Tebaldo, growing rapidly angry.

"Oh, no! You must have known it before I

did. I merely made a remark—why are you so angry? She will come back. She will probably come just when you are ready to marry Miss Slayback.”

“Will you leave my affairs to me, and go?” Tebaldo made a step forward.

“My dear Tebaldo, I wish you would not be so furious about nothing. I come in peace, and you receiv  me like a wild animal. I am anxious about your marriage. It will be the salvation of our family, and the sooner you can conclude the matter, the better it will be for all of us.”

“I do not see what advantage you are likely to gain by my marriage.”

“Think of the position! It is a great advantage to be the brother of a rich man.”

“In order to borrow money of him. I see.”

“Not necessarily. It will change our position very much. The danger is that your friend Aliandra may spoil everything, if she hears of Miss Slayback.”

“Either go, or speak plainly,” said Tebaldo, beginning to walk up and down in order to control the impulse that was driving him to strike his brother.

Francesco sat down upon the edge of the writing-table and lighted a cigarette.

“It is a pity that we should be always quarrelling,” he said.

"If you had not come here, we should not have quarrelled now," observed Tebaldo, thrusting his hands into his pockets, lest they should do Francesco some harm.

"We should have quarrelled the next time we met," continued the latter. "We always do. I wish to propose a peace, a compromise that may settle matters for ever."

"What matters? There are no matters to settle. Let me alone, and I will let you alone."

"Of course, you really mean to marry Miss Slayback? Do you, or do you not?"

"What an absurd question! If I do not mean to marry her, why do you suppose I waste my time with her? Do you imagine that I am in love with her?" He laughed harshly.

"Exactly," answered Francesco, as though his brother's question seemed perfectly natural to him. "The only explanation of your conduct is that you wish to marry the girl and get her money. It is very wise. We are all delighted. Vittoria likes her for her own sake, and our mother will be very happy. It will console her for Ferdinando's death, which has been a great blow to her."

"Well? Are you satisfied? Is that all you wished to know?" Tebaldo stopped before him.

"No. Not by any means. You marry Miss Slayback, and you get your share. I want mine."

"And what do you consider your share, as you

call it ? ” enquired Tebaldo, with some curiosity, in spite of his ill temper.

“ It does not seem likely that you mean to marry them both,” said Francesco, swinging one leg slowly and blowing the smoke towards the window.

“ Both — whom ? ”

“ Both the American and Aliandra. Of course, you could marry Aliandra in church and the American by a civil marriage, and they might both be satisfied, if you could keep them apart — ”

“ What an infernal scoundrel you are,” observed Tebaldo, slowly.

“ You are certainly not the proper person to point out my moral shortcomings,” retorted Francesco, coolly. “ But I did not suppose that you meant to marry them both, and as you have very wisely decided to take the American girl, I really think you might leave Aliandra to me. If you marry the one, I do not see why I should not marry the other.”

“ If I ever find you making love to Aliandra Basili,” said Tebaldo, with slow emphasis, “ I will break every bone in your body.”

But he still kept his hands in his pockets. Francesco laughed, for he did not believe that he was in present bodily danger. It was not the first time that Tebaldo had spoken in that way.

“ You are ready to quarrel again ! I am sure, I am perfectly reasonable. I wish to marry Aliandra

Basili. I have kept out of your way in that direction for a long time. I should not mention the matter now, unless I were sure that you had made up your mind."

"And —" Tebaldo came near to him, but hesitated. "And — excuse me — but what reason have you for supposing that Aliandra will marry you?"

"That is my affair," answered Francesco, but he shrank a little and slipped from his seat on the table to his feet, when he saw his brother's face.

"How do you mean that it is your affair?" asked Tebaldo, roughly. "How do you know that she will marry you? Have you asked her? Has she told you that she loves you?"

Francesco hesitated a moment. The temptation to say that he was loved by Aliandra, merely for the sake of giving his brother pain, was very great. But so was the danger, and that was upon him already, for Tebaldo mistook the meaning of his hesitation, and finally lost his temper.

His sinewy hands went right at his brother's throat, half strangling him in an instant, and then swinging him from side to side on his feet as a terrier shakes a rat. If Francesco had carried even a pocket knife, he would have had it out in an instant, and would have used it. But he had no weapon, and he was no match for Tebaldo in a fury. He struck out fiercely enough with his fists,

but the other's hands were above his own, and he could do nothing. He could not even cry out, for he was half choked, and Tebaldo was quite silent in his rage. There would have been murder, had there been weapons within the reach of either.

When Tebaldo finally threw him off, Francesco fell heavily upon one knee against the door, but caught the handle with one hand, and regained his feet instantly.

"You shall pay me yet," he said in a low voice, his throat purple, but his face suddenly white.

"Yes. This is only something on account," said Tebaldo, with a sneer. "You shall have the rest of the payment some other time."

But Francesco was gone before the last words had passed his brother's lips. The door closed behind him, and Tebaldo heard his quick footsteps outside as he went off in the direction of his own room.

The angry man grew calmer when he was alone, but now and then, as he walked up and down, and backwards and forwards, he clenched his hands spasmodically, wishing that he still had his brother in his grip. Yet, when he reflected, as he began to do before long, upon what had really happened, he realized that he had not, after all, had much reason for taking his brother by the throat. It was the hesitation that had made his temper break out. But then, it might have meant so much. In

his present state, the thought that perhaps Aliandra loved Francesco was like the bite of a horse-fly in a raw wound, and he quivered under it. He could not get away from it. He fancied he saw Francesco kissing Aliandra's handsome mouth, and that her eyes smiled, and then her eyelids drooped with pleasure. His anger subsided a little, but his jealousy grew monstrously minute by minute, and his wrath smouldered beneath it. He remembered past days and meetings, and glances Aliandra had given his brother, such as she had never bestowed upon himself. She did not love him, though she wished to marry him, and was determined to do so, if it were possible. But it flashed upon him that she loved Francesco, and had loved him from the first. That was not quite the truth, though it was near it, and he saw a hundred things in the past to prove that it was the truth altogether.

He was human enough to feel the wound to his vanity, and the slight cast upon him by a comparison in which Francesco was preferred to him, as well as the hurt at his heart which came with it. He did not know of Francesco's daily visits, but he suspected them and exaggerated all he guessed. Doubtless Francesco had seen her again and again alone, quite lately, while Tebaldo had been made to endure day after day the presence of Aliandra's aunt in the room. Again the red-lipped vision of a kiss flashed in the shadow of

the room, a living picture, and once more his eyes grew red, and his hands clenched themselves spasmodically, closing on nothing.

She had said that she preferred Francesco. She had almost admitted that she loved him, and he could remember how cold her eyes had been while she had been saying it. There had been another light in them for his brother, and she had not held her hands behind her back when Francesco had held out his. Or else she had, laughingly. And then she had put up her face, instead, for him to kiss. Tebaldo ground his teeth.

His jealousy got hold of him in the vitals and gnawed cruelly. Everything in his own room made him think of Aliandra, though there was not one object in a score that could possibly have any association with her, nor any right to remind him of her, as he tried to tell himself. But his watch, lying on the toilet table, made him think of her watch, a pretty little one he had given her. His gloves made him think of her gloves, his books recalled hers, his very chairs, as they chanced to stand about the room, revived the memory of how other chairs had stood when he had parted from her. The infinite pettiness of the details that irritated him did not shock his reason as would have happened at any other time. On the contrary, the more of them sprang up, the more they stung him. Instead of one gadfly, there were hundreds. And

all the time there was the almost irresistible physical longing to go to her, and throw over everything else. He went out, for he could not bear his room any longer.

It was still hot in the streets in the early afternoon, and there was a fierce glare all through the new part of the city where there were many white houses in straight rows along smoothly paved streets. Tebaldo walked in the shade, and once or twice he took off his hat for a moment and let the dry, hot breeze blow upon his forehead. The strong light was somehow a relief as he grew accustomed to it, and his southern nature regained its balance in the penetrating warmth. He walked quickly, not heeding his direction, as he followed the line of broad shade and passed quickly through the blazing sunshine that filled the crossing of each side street.

He regained his normal state, and presently, being quite calm, he stopped and quietly lighted a cigar. Like many men of ardent and choleric temperament, he neither smoked nor drank much, but there were times, like the present, when smoking helped him to think quietly.

Before the cigar was half finished he was at the door of the hotel at which Miss Slayback and her aunt were staying. He was glad that he had decided to see her on that afternoon, and he attributed the good sense, as he would have called it,

which had ultimately brought him to her door, to the soothing influence of the tobacco.

Miss Slayback was alone in the sitting-room. The blinds were closed, but the windows were open, and the warm breeze stirred the white curtains. It was an ordinary hotel sitting-room, like hundreds of others, but Miss Lizzie had not been satisfied with such mediocrity of surroundings, and had taken much pains to give the room an inhabited look. She had, of course, bought several hundred objects of no particular value, as rich women who visit Rome for the first time invariably do, and most of them were in sight in her sitting-room. There were photographs by the score, pinned to the walls and standing on tables, and heaped together in a corner. The photograph is the irresistible temptation to women. There were three or four clever water-colour studies of men and women in costume, such as one sees everywhere in Rome; there were half a dozen bronzes copied, in the unfinished, wholesale manner, from the antique; there was the inevitable old choir book of the psalms, with the old musical notation that is still used for plain chaunt, written on parchment and opened at the page which presented the best illuminated capital letter; there were three or four pieces of old embroidered vestments, draped over the backs of chairs, and there were several vases containing fresh flowers and dry wild grasses

from the Campagna. And there was Miss Lizzie Slayback.

She was exceedingly pretty in a sort of non-descript dress, between a tea-gown and something else; for though it was adorned with ribbons and laces, after the manner of tea-gowns, it was short-skirted when she stood up. In fact, it was 'a little creation' of her own, as her dressmaker would have said, thereby disclaiming all responsibility for its eccentricity. But it was distinctly becoming, and Miss Lizzie knew it.

There is a great difference, morally, between being vain and being æsthetically aware of one's advantages and good points. Vanity is even more blind than love, but there is something really and healthily artistic in judicious and successful self-adornment. Vanity paints its eyes, and rouges its cheeks, and dyes its hair, and laces its waist till its ribs crack. Good taste cuts its clothes according to its figure and its age, instead of pinching its body to fit its clothes. Vanity is full of affectation; good taste presents the best it has to view, so far as it can, and hides what is less good, without attempting to distort it, because what is not good cannot be made to look good, by torture, to eyes that understand. The vain woman interprets the statement that she is clay, in a literal sense, and tries to violently model her clay into the Venus of her dreams. The woman of taste accepts

the fact that she is not a goddess and makes the best of her mortality as she has received it.

Miss Slayback was very pretty, and even Tebaldo Pagliuca admitted the fact, though he was not in the least in love with her. She smiled and looked ten times prettier than before, as he entered the room.

"My aunt is supposed to be out," she said, as he sat down. "But she is in the next room. So it is quite proper."

She laughed a little at her own speech, for she was still amused by European ideas of propriety, and she would have been surprised if anyone had been shocked by her receiving Tebaldo alone, when Mrs. Slayback was really asleep in the next room, during the heat of the afternoon. Tebaldo smiled courteously, leaned back a little in his small, low armchair, and fixed his eyes upon her face in silence. His expression might have deceived an older and a wiser woman.

"I am very glad to find you alone," he said softly, after an emphatic pause of admiration. "Your aunt is one of the most charming women in the world, of course, but—"

"But she is not always necessary," interrupted Miss Slayback. "Do you want to see my new embroidery? I bought it this morning—"

"No. I do not care about your embroideries. I came to see you, not vestments."

"It is not a vestment. It is an altar cloth —"

"It is not you, at all events," said Tebaldo, fixing his eyes upon her again. "I want you and only you — to-day, to-morrow, and for ever." His voice was well modulated.

Miss Lizzie looked down, thoughtfully, but she did not blush. Tebaldo leaned forward a little, gazing earnestly into her face. But she looked down and said nothing, for she wished him to say more. It was pleasant to hear, and though her eyes were bent upon the carpet, she could really see his face quite distinctly.

"I think you see and understand that I love you devotedly," he said in soft tones.

It was not easy for him, with his ideas, to make the statement in cold blood, so to say. But that was evidently what she expected, and he did his best.

"You must have seen it," he continued. "You must have understood it. I have tried to express it to you with the most profound-respect, with that respect which I have felt for you from the first, and shall always feel, and wish to feel, for my wife."

Possibly Miss Lizzie, not being a Latin, would have been willing to hear less about respect and more about love. But he managed to make his tone convey something of that also. She looked up, slowly raising her long black lashes, till her dark blue eyes met his.

"You know," she said, with an odd mixture of gentleness and wilfulness, "if I marry you, you must always let me do exactly as I please."

Tebaldo had known her long enough to be past the stage in which she could surprise him. The conception of American life which he had formed from her conversation was somewhat fantastic.

"You would not be so frank if you meant to misuse your liberty," he answered wisely.

"Do not be so sure!" laughed Miss Lizzie, gaily.

But Tebaldo wanted a more binding reply to his proposal.

"Please do not laugh," he said. "Your answer—your consent will transport me to paradise."

"I hope not," answered the girl, still laughing a little. "I prefer you on earth, if I am to marry you."

"You are adorable!" exclaimed Tebaldo, understanding that he must accept her jesting humour.

"Yes? Am I?" She smiled.

"But you see that I adore you, worship you—love you! Everyone does—"

"I do not want everyone—"

"But me? That is the question. Do you—"

"Oh, yes! I want you," she answered, interrupting him. "Please let me think a moment. I am making up my mind."

Thereupon Miss Lizzie got up from her seat. Tebaldo rose also, wondering what she might be

going to do to help her mind in making itself up. He rather expected that she meant to go into the next room to consult her aunt before giving her final answer. But she had no intention of doing that. She went to the window, and looked through the slats of the closed blinds, into the hot glare outside. Tebaldo remained standing close to the chair in which he had been sitting. As has been said, she could no longer surprise him, but he watched the ways and manners of the American young girl with interest, even while he grew nervous as he thought of the magnitude of the stake he hoped to win.

Miss Lizzie stayed some time at the window, without moving. When she suddenly turned back into the room, and came straight up to Tebaldo, her face was a little paler than usual; but he could not see it, for the light was behind her. Her manner had quite changed now, and she spoke very gravely.

"I have not known you very long, and you are asking me to put my whole life in your hands," she said. "I like you very much. I care for you so much that I am going to trust you, though I know you so little. I am going to say yes."

She laid her hands in his trustfully, and looked up into his face. His lids half veiled his eyes, for the triumph in his look was not the triumph of love, and he knew it. No sane man is without some good impulse, be he ever so bad.

"I thank you with all my heart," he said, wisely choosing simple words now; and he pressed her hands gently. "I shall try to make you happy," he added.

It all seemed very strange to her. Possibly something warned her even then that he was very false, more false than she could have understood. She had expected, shyly and with a little not quite unpleasant trepidation, that he would suddenly catch her in his arms and kiss her a score of times, quickly, as no one had ever kissed her. Yet there he stood, quite calm, just pressing the tips of her fingers, as though he were afraid of hurting her, and saying that he meant to make her happy. She was disappointed, though she would not have admitted that she was.

She little guessed that the bad man had just then chanced to feel one of the few good impulses that ever disturbed him. At that moment it would have seemed considerably worse to him to act as she really expected that he would than it would have seemed to cut Francesco's throat in his sleep. Explain those things who can. There is good in human nature, even at its worst; and it comes to the surface unexpectedly. Francesco, whose character was on the whole far less evil and malevolent, would have had no such scruple. To him a woman was a woman, and nothing more. But Tebaldo either loved or did not love, and the woman he did not

love was not a woman at all in his eyes. And since in this case she chanced to be an innocent girl, his manliness—for he was manly and physically brave—revolted at the idea of offending her innocence.

An old-fashioned theologian might say that a man who has no good in him is not properly fit to be damned. Such a man would have no free-will, and could not, therefore, logically be punished for anything he did. That was not Tebaldo Pagliuca's case, at all events.

Miss Lizzie stood still a moment, looking up to his face, after he had spoken; then she drew away her hands, and sat down again, feeling rather shy, for the first time since she had been a child. It seemed strange that it should all be over, and that she was to be married. Tebaldo began a little speech.

"You have made me very happy," he said; and he formed a number of fairly well turned phrases, in which to express his satisfaction, which was genuine, and his affection, which was not.

She did not hear him, for her own thoughts seemed louder than his smoothly spoken words. She was happy, and yet she was uncomfortable, in an undefined way, and did not know what was the matter. He did not seem to expect any response just then, and she let him talk on. Then she was aware that he was repeating a question.

"May I announce our engagement?" he was asking, for the second time.

"Of course!" she exclaimed, suddenly realizing the sense of his words. "It is not a thing to be concealed. I will tell my aunt at once. You must come and see her this evening—no, we are going somewhere—I forget where! Come to-morrow, please."

"And when—?" He purposely left the sentence incomplete, filling the question with one of the long looks he had employed so often with such success.

"When what? Oh! You mean, when shall we be married? Let me see. It is May now. I shall have to go to Paris, of course. You will come, will you not?"

"Could we not be married first, and go to Paris afterwards?" enquired Tebaldo.

But Miss Lizzie had no intention of being hurried to the altar without having got the full amount of enjoyment out of buying beautiful clothes, and Tebaldo was obliged to content himself with a promise that the wedding should take place early in the autumn. She wished to be married in Rome by an archbishop, if not by a cardinal. Tebaldo agreed to the whole college of cardinals, if necessary.

When he went away, he walked more slowly. The sun was very low, and the air was growing

cooler. He sauntered down towards the Corso, well pleased with his own prospects and thinking out the details of his future with intense satisfaction. Tebaldo was no spendthrift fool to waste his wife's fortune on absurd frivolities, or to gamble it away in mad speculations. He meant to build up the Corleone once more, and make his family far greater than it had ever been. He did not know exactly how rich Miss Slayback was, but his guessing was, if anything, under the truth, and he had seen enough of her to know that she desired to be a personage, and was attracted by the idea of rank. He knew that she and her aunt had taken pains to enquire into the validity of his titles. He smiled when he remembered how cheaply he had held them in the old days at Camaldoli, when he would have sold his birthright for a new rifle, and a title or two for a supply of ammunition; and he admired in himself the transformation from the rough country gentleman, hardly one step above the tenant farmer of the Sicilian hills, to the fashionable young nobleman, engaged to be married to a great heiress, and already on the point of restoring to his family all its ancient magnificence.

He walked the length of the Corso and back before he went home. He had hardly entered his room when there was a light knock at the door. Vittoria entered, looking pale and frightened.

"What was the matter between you and Francesco?" she asked as soon as she had shut the door behind her.

"The matter?" Tebaldo looked at her curiously, wondering whether she knew anything about Aliandra Basili. "We quarrelled, as usual," he said briefly.

"It must have been worse than usual," said Vittoria, in a low voice. "He is gone."

"Gone? Where? Gone out to dinner?" Tebaldo affected to laugh carelessly.

"No. I think he is gone to Sicily," answered the young girl.

Tebaldo uttered an exclamation of surprise, and his expression changed as he looked at his sister.

"Yes," she continued. "He made a terrible scene with me and our mother—not exactly a scene, perhaps—it was all about you. He said that he was going, that he could not live in the house any longer, that he should never come back again. He said—" she hesitated.

"What more did he say?"

"He was half mad, I think. He said it was better to be an outlaw than to live under such a brother as you, and that he would pay you for what you had done to him in the way you least expected."

"What makes you think that he is gone to Sicily?" asked Tebaldo, very quietly, while his lids drooped at the corners.

"He looked for the trains in the newspaper, and I heard him say 'Reggio' and 'Messina.' We tried to quiet him—we did what we could. But he packed a quantity of things in a hurry, and went off in a cab, looking at his watch, and saying that he had barely time. Mother fell into one of those terrible fits of crying that she has sometimes, and she is ill again. I thought it best to tell you."

"Certainly," said Tebaldo, thoughtfully. "And now that you have told me, please go away, for I must dress."

She was already turning, for she was used to his peremptory ways, but he stopped her.

"I may as well tell you, Vittoria," he said; "I am engaged to be married to your friend Miss Slayback. I hope that, as the marriage will be so advantageous to our family, you will not criticise me to her too much. I am not quite so bad as you sometimes think."

Vittoria looked at him in silence for three or four seconds before she spoke.

"I shall say nothing to injure you with her," she said slowly, and at once left the room.

CHAPTER XXV

ALIANDRA was received in Randazzo with that sort of ovation which only Italians accord to a successful artist; and her father's house was filled for a whole day with the respectable townsmen and their wives and daughters, who came to greet her and congratulate her. For the newspapers had informed them of her successes in Rome, and the Sicilian papers had exaggerated the original reports tenfold. The mayor and his wife, the municipal officers, the grey-haired lieutenant of carabinieri with his pretty daughter, the rector, the curate, the young emigration agent of the big steamship company with his betrothed bride and her mother, the principal shopkeeper with his wife and children, the innkeeper—in short, all that represented the highest fashion in Randazzo, including Don Tolomeo Bellini, the most important tenant farmer on the great Fornasco estate as well as a small freeholder, whose ancestors had been privileged to bear arms, and who, therefore, ranked as a gentleman and stamped the cheeses from his dairy with a little five-pointed coronet. Basili had formerly hoped to get him for a son-in-law,

and he would have been considered a very good match for the notary's daughter.

All Randazzo talked of the singer's return, and the poor people crowded the street to get a look at her. The mayor said she was an honour to the province and to Sicily, and the rector, who had baptized her, expressed his hope that she might be always as good as she was famous, for he distrusted the name of art, but wished the girl well for her father's sake and her own.

Don Atanasio, the apothecary of Santa Vittoria, tried to persuade his daughter to go with him down to Randazzo and pay Aliandra a visit.

"It will divert you a little from your sorrow, my daughter," he said, shaking his head.

Concetta's dark eyes turned slowly towards her father with a wondering look, as though she were amazed at his audacity and yet pitied his inability to measure her grief.

"The dead need no amusements," she said, gravely. "They are very quiet. They wait."

"Eh — but the living," objected Don Atanasio. "We are alive, you know."

Concetta did not heed what he said.

"The dead are very quiet. They wait for the Judgment and the Resurrection — the judgment of blood, and the resurrection of the innocent. Then they will be alive again."

Don Atanasio sighed, for his unhappy daughter

was no longer like other women. She was of those simple beings for whom life has but one purpose after love has taken possession, and from whom the loved one, dying, takes all purpose away for ever. The old man sighed and looked sideways at her, and a tear ran down his thin, straight nose, and fell upon the plaster he was spreading on the marble slab before him; but his daughter's dark eyes were dry. She was sitting on a little low stool behind one end of the counter, where she could not be seen by anyone who might chance to come into the shop. Her head was screened by the great old-fashioned marble mortar.

Don Atanasio laid down the broad mixing-knife he was using, pushed back the black broadcloth cap which Concetta had once embroidered with a design of green leaves, wiped his spectacles, turned away to blow his nose with a large coloured handkerchief, and turned back again to take a long look at the girl. He laid his hand gently on her head, pressing her forehead back until she looked up into his face.

"You wish to make me die also," he said slowly. "What have I done that you wish to make me die?"

She looked at him very sadly, and then quickly got hold of his other hand and kissed it with a sort of devotion. She was very fond of him. He patted the back of her head affectionately.

"In truth, my dear," he said gently, "if I see you always thus, I shall not live long, for I have only you in the world, and the rest does not matter. But it is not that, since I would die to make you happy. What should it be for me? I am old. I am of no use. They will have another apothecary in Santa Vittoria. That is nothing. My thoughts are for you."

"Do not think for me," answered the girl. "I sit here quietly. I do no harm. And then, when it is later, I go to see my dead one every day."

"But it is not good to do this always," objected Don Atanasio, coaxingly. "That is why I say come down with me to Randazzo to-morrow, and let us go and see the notary Basili, who has broken his leg, and his daughter, the great singer, who has come back from Rome to visit him. She is a good girl, and you can make a little conversation with her. It will be a diversion, a sober diversion, and the air will do you good, and the movement."

She kissed his hand again, then dropped it, and drew up her black shawl over her head, for she heard a step on the threshold. Don Atanasio heard it, too, and immediately took up his mixing-knife and went to work again at the plaster. The new-comer was the lieutenant who commanded the infantry men quartered in Santa Vittoria. He asked for six grains of quinine in three doses.

He was a quiet young fellow, scrupulously neat

in his close-fitting tunic with its turned-down velvet collar, his small red moustache, carefully trimmed, and his red hair parted behind and well brushed below his cap. He had singularly bright blue eyes with rough red eyebrows and a bright and healthy but much freckled complexion.

Don Atanasio proceeded to weigh out the little doses of the valuable drug, and the officer watched him as he cut the clean white paper into smaller sizes and neatly folded each package.

"Do you know all those Pagliuca brothers?" he asked suddenly.

The apothecary stopped in his work and looked at him keenly. The officer was a Piedmontese, and was, therefore, unpopular in the south.

"Eh!" ejaculated the apothecary. "They formerly lived here. I have seen them."

Concetta did not stir in her hiding-place at the end of the counter, behind the marble mortar. The officer was silent for a moment, and the apothecary hastily folded the last package, slipping one end of the doubled paper into the other, as chemists do, and taking up another sheet of paper in which to wrap the three doses together.

"One of them has suddenly returned here," said the officer. "He is in the neighbourhood, and is not here for any good purpose. Most probably he has come to do some injury to the gentleman who killed his brother, the brigand."

In spite of herself Concetta drew a sharp breath between her teeth. The officer's eyes turned inquisitively towards the corner where she sat.

"It is the cat," said Don Atanasio, calmly. "One lira and fifty centimes, Signor Lieutenant," he added, handing the officer the package across the counter.

"They say that it is Francesco Pagliuca who has come back, and that he was seen this morning in Randazzo," said the young man, while he counted out the money in big coppers; for, as usual in the south, there was a scarcity even of the flimsy little paper notes. "We do not know him by sight, you see," he continued, "and I should be very glad of any information, if you should see him in the village. One thirty — forty — fifty — there it is."

He laid the last copper on the marble slab.

"A thousand thanks, Signor Lieutenant," said Don Atanasio, collecting the coins.

"And you will let us know if you see the young man?" asked the officer.

"You shall be served," replied the apothecary, gravely.

The officer thanked him, nodded, and went out, with a little clattering of his light sabre. When he was gone, Don Atanasio's grave face relaxed in a smile.

"And those are the men who expect to rule us Sicilians," he said in a low voice, more to himself

than to his daughter. "They wish to catch a man. What do they do? They warn his friends by asking questions. What can such people catch? A crab, as we say, that will bite their own fingers. Then they complain. They are like children. They do not even know what the mafia is, and they come to Sicily."

Concetta sat quite still in her corner, thinking. It seemed to her sure that Francesco Pagliuca had come to kill Orsino Saracinesca, for his brother's sake. That was what the officer thought, and all the soldiers would be looking out for Francesco, and on the smallest excuse he would be arrested on mere suspicion. It did not strike her that he could possibly have come for any other purpose, and her one desire was that Orsino should be killed. That was man's work, that killing, and she would leave it to the men. But if none of them would do it, she would some day take her father's gun and wait for Orsino at the cemetery, for he often passed that way. She was not afraid to kill him, but she considered it to be the duty and business of the Corleone men. They had prior rights, and, besides, they were men. A woman should not do any killing so long as there were men to do it, except in self-defence.

It was clearly her duty, she thought, to warn Francesco that the soldiers were aware of his presence in the neighbourhood. It would be much

wiser of him, she reflected, to communicate with the outlaws who were about Noto, and get half a dozen resolute fellows to help him. She had no knowledge of his character, though she had often met him, and she supposed him to be like his brothers, bold and determined. So she wished to warn him, in order that he might safely accomplish what she supposed must be his purpose.

The difficulty lay in finding him. Her father might help her, perhaps, but it was doubtful. It was quite certain that he could not say or do anything which could thwart Francesco's plans, but, on the other hand, she knew that he would be careful not to seem to help him, for he had to keep on good terms with the authorities, for the simple reason that he held a government license as apothecary, which could easily be taken from him.

"Did you know that Francesco Pagliuca had come back?" she asked, after a long silence, during which the plaster had been finished, folded up, and laid aside ready to be called for.

"I knew," answered Don Atanasio, but he did not seem inclined to say anything more.

"Why did you not tell me, father?" asked the girl.

"It might have given you pain, my child. And then, one does not say everything one knows. One forgets many things. He slept at the house of Don Taddeo, the grocer."

"Where is he now? Is he still here?"

"Who shall say where he is? Heaven knows where he is. I cannot know everything."

He answered with a little irritation, for he understood that Concetta wished to see her dead lover's brother, and he could not understand how any good could come of the meeting.

Concetta rose slowly to her feet and came out from behind the counter. She had grown very thin, but she was not less beautiful. She drew her black shawl together under her chin, and it fell over her forehead to her eyes. There was no disguise in it, for everyone knew her, but she felt that it gave her some privacy in her grief, even in broad day and in the street.

"I go to breathe the air," she said quietly, moving towards the door.

"Go, my daughter, you need it," answered the apothecary.

He watched her sadly, and as she went out he moved to the entrance of the shop and looked after her. Tall, sad, and black, and graceful, she walked smoothly along the shady side of the street, which was deserted in the blazing noon. Don Atanasio did not go in again till she had turned the corner and was out of sight.

She found the grocer's brother, the fat and cross-eyed sacristan, eating dark brown beans out of an earthen bowl with an iron fork, in the open

shop. No one else was there. It was a cool, vaulted place, with a floor of beaten cement and volcanic ashes, and a number of big presses, in a row behind a long walnut counter, black and polished with age. Hams and sides of bacon hung from the ceiling, and the air smelt of salt pork, cereals, and candles. The fat man sat on a bench, in his shirt sleeves, eating his beans with a sort of slow voracity. He looked up as Concetta's shadow darkened the door.

"Will you accept?" he asked, lifting his earthen bowl a little as he spoke.

"Thank you, and good appetite," answered the girl. "How are you?"

"Always to serve you, most gentle Concetta," said the man. "What do you need?"

"Eat," replied Concetta, sitting down upon a rush-bottom chair. "I do not come to disturb you. Are you all alone?" She peered into the shadows at the back of the shop.

"Eh, you know how it is? Taddeo eats and then goes to sleep, and while he sleeps I keep the shop. In truth, it needs no great merchant to do that, for no one comes at this hour."

"And you and your brother do not eat together?"

"Generally we do, but to-day, who knows how it was? He ate first and went to sleep. Then I brought my beans here for company. This is our conversation. I open my mouth, and before I can

speaking the beans answer me. This I call, indeed, conversation."

"And Francesco Pagliuca, with whom does he converse upstairs?" asked Concetta, lowering her voice.

The man looked up quickly, with his mouth full, as though to see whether she were in earnest and knew the truth. A glance convinced him that she did.

"He went to Randazzo at dawn," he said, almost in a whisper. "He makes love with the notary's daughter there."

Concetta did not believe that this could be the only reason for Francesco's return.

"Why does he not stay at Randazzo, then?" she enquired. "Why should he come here at all? It is a long way."

"Perhaps he is afraid of Basili's friends," suggested the fat man. "Or he prefers to sleep here because the air is better. He will certainly not tell us why he comes."

"Is he coming back this evening?"

"I think so, for he has a box here with his clothes, and other things. But for charity's sake, tell no one."

"I?" Concetta laughed in a cold way, without a smile. "I wish to warn him that the soldiers know he was in Randazzo yesterday, and are looking out for him."

She told the man of the lieutenant's visit to her father's shop, and he listened attentively.

"I could wait for him in the road," he said. "He thought that the soldiers would not know him here, because they are all new men. But they have seen him in Randazzo and have sent word. They think that he has come on account of the Saracinesca, but he has followed the notary's daughter from Rome. They cannot touch him so long as he does no harm."

"They may prevent him from doing it," said Concetta, looking steadily at the man.

"That would be a pity," he answered gravely. "I will wait for him in the road."

"But if he comes by the bridle path over the hills, you will miss him."

"I do not think he will do that, for it is a bad road, and he had my brother's best horse to ride."

"Go and wait in the bridle path," said Concetta. "I will wait in the road, towards Camaldoli."

"He will not come before sunset," observed the sacristan. "That crazy priest of the Saracinesca, Don Ippolito, comes to play the organ in Santa Vittoria every day, and pays me to blow the bellows, and he never goes away till twenty-three o'clock."

Twenty-three of the clock is half an hour before the sun sets, at all times of the year, by the old reckoning, which is still in use in the south.

"You can send a boy to blow the bellows," suggested Concetta. "You cannot trust anyone to warn Francesco Pagliuca."

They both supposed that since enquiry was being made for him, he would be in imminent danger of arrest, with or without any legal grounds, an opinion sufficiently indicative of the state of the country. The man stared blankly at the wall for a few seconds after Concetta had last spoken, then nodded, and began to eat again.

The girl rose from her chair, and moved towards the door with her graceful, slowly cadenced step. She had done what she had come to do and was quite sure of the man, as indeed she had reason to be, for the mafia protects its own, and generally has its own way in the end, in spite of governments and soldiers. If Concetta and the fat sacristan asked no one to help them, it was because it was such a very simple matter to warn Francesco of danger, that they needed no assistance. But as they needed none, they told no one what they were going to do.

Concetta came home again to the quiet little shop, and Don Atanasio bolted the glass door, and they both went upstairs to dinner. The girl ate a little better than usual, and sipped half a glass of strong, black wine.

"The air did you good," observed her father, looking at her. "Eh, this human body! What is

it? Who shall ever understand it? You go out every afternoon, when it is cool, for two hours, and it does you no good, and you eat no more than a bee takes from a flower. And to-day you go out for half an hour into a heat that would burn up paving-stones, and you come back with an appetite. So much the better. It is not I that should complain, if you ate the house and the walls, poor child."

"When the heart is thirsty for blood, the body is not hungry for meat," said the beautiful, white-faced girl, in her clear, low voice.

CHAPTER XXVI

IPPOLITO and Orsino had already acquired certain fixed habits in their several occupations, so that they rarely failed to meet at the same regular hours and then separate again, each doing the same or similar things day after day. Such regularity becomes a second nature in remote places where there is little chance that anything unexpected should happen.

Orsino had really not enough to do, after he had once familiarized himself with his surroundings. So long as San Giacinto had remained, it had been different; for he had great plans, and had spent much time in riding about the country with an engineer from Palermo who was to build the light railway round Etna. San Giacinto had now gone back to Rome, however, leaving his cousin in charge of Camaldoli, with directions to manage things with an easy hand, so as not to prejudice the people against the work of the railway when it should be begun. To do this meant, practically, to leave the tenants to their own devices, unless it were possible to help them in any way to which they should not object. At the same time, there

were certain defensive measures which were always necessary, for no one knew when the brigands might grow weary of Noto and appear on the slopes of Etna again to avenge their friend, Ferdinando Pagliuca.

Orsino used to ride about a good deal, more for the sake of exercise than for anything he could accomplish, and he carried his rifle now as a matter of habit, but rarely took one or two of the carabineers with him. He began to believe that there were not really any outlaws at all, and that Ferdinando's unknown friend had left that part of the country. Ippolito, as a priest, went about unarmed, and, being naturally fearless, he rambled about as he pleased. Almost every day he walked to Santa Vittoria and spent an hour at the organ. Orsino accompanied him, when there was any reason for going to the village, but it did not amuse him to hear his brother's music. In fact, it was rather a relief to him not to hear the piano constantly at his elbow, as he heard it when Ippolito played in their joint sitting-room in Rome.

On the afternoon of the day on which Concetta had walked to the grocer's shop, Ippolito strolled up to the small church as usual. There was a little lame boy who had discovered the priest's habits, and used to hang about in the afternoon in the hope of earning a penny by calling the fat sacristan to come and blow the organ. He was not

strong enough to blow it himself, and was content and glad to get a copper or two for limping into the village with his message. Ippolito now had a key of his own to the church, and went inside while the man was coming. Each day, during the twenty minutes or so which generally elapsed, he worked at the back of the instrument, repairing with bits of wire a number of trackers that ran from the pedals to a wooden stop set up on one side of the organ. At some former time the connexions had been repaired with waxed string, which the hungry church mice had gnawed to pieces. It was a troublesome job, requiring patience and some mechanical skill, as well as two or three simple tools which Ippolito had brought from Rome and now left in the organ until the work should be finished.

Instead of the sacristan, a big boy appeared on this particular day, the same who had carried the holy water for the priest who had come down to Camaldoli when Ferdinando had been killed. He explained that the sacristan had been sent on an errand to Bronte by his brother, the grocer, and had left him, the boy, to do duty at the bellows if needed. Ippolito thought nothing of the matter, and sat down to make music, as usual. The days were growing very long, and he generally regulated his stay in the church by the sun rather than by his watch. Sometimes the fat sacristan came

round from behind, perspiring, and declaring that his brother needed him at home.

Meanwhile Concetta had gone down the road to the cemetery just beyond the shoulder of the hill, out of sight of the village and the little church in which Ippolito was playing the organ. It was her hour, and he had grown used to seeing her sitting on the curbstone by the churchyard gate every day when he went home just before sunset. When she passed the church and heard the music through the door that was left ajar, she knew also who was there, and her eyes darkened as she went by, and she drew her shawl more closely about her head. And she recognized the priest's light step when he came by the cemetery gate an hour later, and she always turned her face away, that she might not see him.

The people knew her, too, and most of them pitied her, and all respected her sorrow. Some of the labourers who came down from the hill farm, by the paths that turned into the main road just at the end of the churchyard, used to touch their hats when they passed her, and, when she chanced to be looking, she nodded gravely, acknowledging their greeting. They knew she was half mad, but the madness of a great sorrow has always been respected by simple folks who feel seldom, but keenly, and think little. The peasants generally passed about sunset on their way into the village.

To-day Concetta came to the gate as usual, and when she reached it Francesco was no longer uppermost in her thoughts. At the sight of the black cross that marked the last grave on the left, the whole world vanished again, and her sorrow came down like a darkness between her and all life. She stood with dry eyes and compressed lips, grasping the iron rails that were hot with the level sun, and out of the long, low mound rose the face and figure of the well-loved man.

There can be nothing intellectual in the spasm of a great sorrow, in the blind grasping upon emptiness for what is not, in the heart-famine that no living thing can satisfy. Such grief brings no thoughts, for it is the very contrary of thinking. It is only when each returning convulsion has subsided that thought comes back, and then it comes uncertainly like the sense of touching a small object through a heavy pall.

Concetta had no consciousness of the passing of time, as she stood at the gate, nor for a long while afterwards, when she had sat down upon the curbstone in her accustomed attitude, with her shawl drawn down over her face, shielding it from the low rays of the sinking sun, and from the sight of the world that was so desolate for her. As spring warmed to summer, no one passed that way who could help it, for the road was dusty and hot.

Two of the foot-carabineers passed her, returning to Santa Vittoria from their regular patrol of the high road, their carbines slung over their shoulders and their pipe-clayed cross-belts gleaming white in the sun. They knew her, too, and barely glanced at her as they went by. She did not even raise her head, though she remembered, now, that she had come to wait for Francesco Pagliuca, and she was glad that the patrol had marched up again, for he must be following them, and could thus not be met by them. She knew that he would come on horseback. As she strained her ears to catch the distant sound of hoofs, the savage longing for revenge began to burn again in her heart. Surely he must have come for that, and not really for love of Aliandra Basili. If he reached the cemetery in time, he could kill Ippolito, the priest, as he came down from the church. She would show him just where to stand with his gun, at the corner of the wall, and she would stand beside him; and then, if he were quick, he could get down half way to Camaldoli, near the crossroads and kill Orsino, too, when he came up hastily to see his dead brother. The vision of much blood reddened before her aching eyes, as she listened for the horse's hoofs. If only he could come before Ippolito, she thought, and she listened also for the priest's light step behind her.

Francesco came first. She saw him far down

the road before the first sound reached her. He was riding leisurely up the steep way, a broad hat drawn over his eyes, against the level sun, that gleamed like fire on the barrel of his rifle. She could see that from time to time he looked behind him quickly. He was warned already, she thought. So much the better. If only he would quicken his speed a little. Ippolito almost always passed the graveyard before the sun was quite down. Her heart beat very fast as she heard the clink of the horse's iron shoes against the stones, and then the rattle of the tiny pebbles that flew up and fell to right and left at every step.

She rose when he was within fifty yards of her, and threw the black shawl back from her splendid black hair. He knew her face and would stop when he recognized her. She remembered the sound of his voice, and how he had said in her hearing that she was very beautiful, and once when she had been alone in her father's shop, he had come in and had talked strangely, and she had been a little frightened, but Ferdinando had entered just then. She remembered it all distinctly. It did not matter, now, for he had come to avenge Ferdinando. The bullets that should do justice were already in the Winchester that gleamed so red in the setting sun.

She stood upright, with her head thrown back, that he might recognize her. He stopped beside her.

"Concetta!" he exclaimed, smiling, as he smiled at every pretty woman. "What brings you here? What are you doing out here in the road alone?"

She hardly saw that he smiled, in her own earnestness.

"That brings me here," she said, pointing through the iron gate. "Do you see? It is the last one on the left, with the black cross."

Francesco looked.

"I see a grave," he said indifferently.

"It is your brother's grave," said the girl. "Ferdinando lies there."

"Oh — I understand."

The young man glanced up and down the road, and dismounted from his horse, passing his arm through the bridle. He advanced close to the gate, and looked through it in silence for several seconds.

"Poor fellow!" he exclaimed, turning away again, but without any very strong feeling in his tone.

Concetta grasped his arm roughly, to draw him after her, and spoke rapidly into his ear.

"The priest Saracinesca will be coming down the road from the village at any moment. Come quickly, come with me. Behind the corner of the wall. You can shoot him from there, and I will hold your horse." She dragged him along and the horse followed, led by his arm. "No one will

come. When he is dead, mount quickly and ride down to the crossroads above Camaldoli, by the fields, and wait behind the shrine. I will run all the way, and tell the other Saracinesca that his brother is dead in the road. He will run out,—from behind the shrine you can kill him easily. Then ride for the woods of Noto. The brigands are there, and you will be safe.”

Almost before he knew where she was leading him, he found himself behind the corner of the cemetery, on the side away from the village. In digging the foundations of the wall, the dark tufo had been broken out of the earth and piled high up at a short distance, so that there was a sort of deep trench between the wall and the heap of stones, out of which the poisonous yellow spurge grew in great bunches. It would have been impossible to select a better spot for an ambush in what was really an open country.

With the unconscious ease of a country-bred woman, Concetta, taking the bridle, backed the horse into the trench so as to leave room in front of him for herself and Francesco to be under cover of the wall. She had scarcely done speaking when they were already in position.

“Get your rifle ready!” she said in a whisper, at the same time taking hold of the leathern belt by which the Winchester was slung. “He may be here at any moment. Be quick!”

"But I do not wish to kill anybody," said Francesco, at last, with an uneasy laugh.

Concetta started and stared at him, too much astonished to despise him yet.

"You do not wish to kill the *Saracinesca*!" Her face expressed blank amazement. "But then, why have you come?"

"Not to murder anyone, at all events. You are quite mad."

"Mad? I? Mad? Is not the body of your murdered brother lying there, on the other side of that wall? Does not his blood cry out for the blood of those who killed him? Have you not come to do justice? Have I not brought you to a safe place? And you call me mad!"

"Quite mad," reiterated Francesco, coolly.

She stared at him a moment longer, and an immense contempt rose in her eyes.

"Give me your rifle," she said in a different tone. "I will kill him, since you are afraid."

"I am not in the least afraid," answered Francesco, with the too ready resentment against a woman's accusation of cowardice, which a real coward always shows. "Not that I see why I should risk being sent to penal servitude because my brother got himself killed in a foolish affair —"

"Foolish?" Concetta's black eyes blazed suddenly from contempt to anger.

"Foolish, yes! Ferdinando — I am sorry for him, of course — but he was a fool."

The back of one little white hand had struck him across the mouth, almost before the word was out.

"Infame!" she cried, using the strongest word in her language.

He did not care for the light blow, still less for the word. She was matchlessly beautiful in her anger, as the blood rose a little in her white cheeks, and her nostrils dilated with wrath. The shawl had fallen almost to the ground, and revealed her perfect throat and exquisitely graceful figure as she faced him. The colour rose in his face, and his lips reddened, and his eyes sparkled badly. Almost before the hand that had struck him had fallen to her side, he had caught her in his arms, and his lips were on hers, smothering her, hurting her, and he was forcing her backwards against the heap of stones — not twenty yards from his brother's grave.

She was lithe and strong, but she was no match for him. Yet, defending herself as she could, like a wild animal, she bit his lip half through, and as he started under the pain she wrenched her head aside and screamed with all her might, once, before he got one of his hands over her mouth.

But her scream had been heard. She had judged rightly that Ippolito Saracinesca would be coming

along the road in a few moments, to meet his death, as she had hoped. Instead, he saved her, for at her cry, being but a few yards from the corner of the wall, he sprang forward, saw a woman struggling against a man, recognizing neither, leapt into the trench and had Francesco by the back of the collar in a moment, twisting the tough starched linen with all the might of his by no means weak white hands. As Orsino had always said, Ippolito was more of a man than anybody suspected, and there was the good blood of his good race in him, and all the fearlessness.

In an instant he had dragged Francesco backwards, half strangled, up the little declivity of the trench, and out into the middle of the road. So far he had done nothing more, perhaps, than was necessary to save the girl. But having got him out, the man's instinct against the wretch that does violence to a woman, took possession of him, and holding Francesco by the back of the collar in front of him with his right hand, he struck him half a dozen times quickly and violently on the side of the head with his left fist, till Francesco, stunned and choked, suddenly fell in a heap in the road.

Concetta had struggled to her feet at once, and stood leaning against the corner of the wall. With a mad horror she saw that she had been saved by the man she had wished to kill. The horse leis-

urely picked its way up through the stones and stood waiting in the road.

At that moment, four peasants coming home from the hill farm came down into the road from behind the other end of the long wall of the cemetery. They naturally glanced downwards before going up towards the village, and seeing the priest standing over a fallen man, they hurried to the spot. Francesco was already beginning to get to his feet. Ippolito drew back a little to be ready if he should be attacked, as he naturally expected. But a moment later the peasants had recognized Francesco, had helped him up, and were dusting his clothes, while they scowled at Ippolito.

"It is well that you come, friends," said Concetta's clear, low voice. "A moment later and another Saracinesca would have killed another Pagliuca."

Ippolito stared at her, dumbfounded by her speech, and then looked at the grim and angry faces of the lean brown men who surrounded Francesco. He could not conceive that a woman whom he had saved from worse than death but a moment earlier should turn upon him instantly, as she was doing.

But she could not help it, for she was half mad, and the idea of injuring the Saracinesca was always uppermost in her unsettled brain. She had come to warn Francesco of danger, because she had loved

his brother, and loved the name; and she had done her best to make him do a murder then and there.

“Help Don Francesco to his horse,” she said to the peasants. “Take him round to the back of Don Taddeo’s house—not through the village—you will meet the carabineers, and he is bleeding. They would see; there would be questions. Go quickly—the patrol passed half an hour ago; the next will come out in half an hour more.”

She foresaw everything. In a moment the men had helped Francesco to the saddle, and they were moving away. He had not uttered a word, surprised, bruised, and terrified as he was, and his lip was bleeding where Concetta had bitten it. His face was white with fear, and he held a handkerchief to his mouth, as he slowly rode away, leaving Concetta and Ippolito standing in the road together.

Ippolito faced the girl quietly enough, but he meant to ask for an explanation of some sort.

“Did you think that I should accuse him, though he is—what he is?” she asked, speaking first. “You saved me from that infamous beast—yes. I thank you, though you are my enemy. But do not think that I value myself higher than the blood of my bridegroom whom you killed. I would rather lose body and soul together than not hurt a Saracinesca if I could, kill you, if I could, give your bodies to dogs, if I could, send you unconfessed to hell, if I could. And you thought

that I would turn and accuse a Corleone when I could accuse a Saracinesca? You do not know us."

She turned from him scornfully before he could answer a word. She had found her little shawl, and she drew it about her face as she moved away. He stood still a moment, looking after her in mute surprise. Then he shook his head and turned towards Camaldoli, not yet understanding that the beautiful girl was not quite sane, but speculating upon women in general, as good priests sometimes do in total ignorance of the subject.

Orsino looked grave when Ippolito told him at supper what had happened.

"The girl is mad," he said sadly, for he was himself the cause of her madness. "And she is a Sicilian. We understand these people very little, after all. I sometimes think we never shall."

"Nobody could possibly understand that kind of woman," observed Ippolito.

"No. Put such a scene as that on the stage, if it were possible, and the audience would hiss it, as a monstrous improbability. They would say that the girl would fall at the feet of her preserver, forget her hatred for ever, or possibly turn it all against the man from whom she had been saved. Unfortunately things are different in real life. Poor Concetta will hate us all the more because

one of us has helped her in danger. It is true that she is mad. All the people say so."

"Because she sits half the day outside the cemetery? It is not a month since Ferdinando died. One need not be mad to feel a great sorrow for a whole month."

"No. Perhaps not. I should like to know what that fellow is here for. It means no good to anyone. I have no doubt that he is in communication with the outlaws, and she is quite capable of trying to help them to catch us."

"Then you really believe in the existence of the brigands, after all," said Ippolito, with a laugh, for Orsino did not often speak of the outlaws seriously.

"We all know that they exist. But we have trouble in realizing that they do. We know the names of many of them. Everybody does. But of course, with so many soldiers about, we feel safe. I wish you could carry a weapon, Ippolito."

"I? I am a priest. Nobody will touch me."

"Do not be too sure. There are even priests who wear a revolver under their cassocks down here."

"I could hardly carry a rifle," remarked Ippolito, laughing again. "And imagine carrying a knife in these days—one of us! It sounds like the last century."

"A knife is a very good weapon, nevertheless.

The peasants say that a knife has more shots in it than a revolver, and does not miss fire."

"I hate the idea of carrying a weapon."

"Yes, no doubt. But suppose that matters had turned out a little differently to-day, and that Francesco Pagliuca, instead of being an abject coward, had turned upon you and fought you for his life. What could you have done with your hands?"

"A priest has no business to be fighting," said Ippolito. "When he fights, he must take the consequences."

"But you could not escape it to-day. The cause was just and urgent. As a man, you could not have done otherwise."

"Certainly not. I admit that, and the fellow was scared. He had a Winchester rifle across his back. It got into the way when I twisted his collar, I remember. Do you know that I never struck anyone before? It was rather a curious sensation."

"You have struck me often enough," laughed Orsino. "You used to fight like a wildcat when we were little boys. It is a pity that you turned priest."

"I am very glad I did," said Ippolito. "Besides, I do not like fighting. It was different when we were children and pummelled each other."

"Look here," said Orsino. "I shall feel anxious

about you after this affair. Unless you will carry some weapon, I shall have you escorted to Santa Vittoria and back by a carabineer."

"How absurd!"

"I will, I assure you. If you were like that miserable Francesco Pagliuca, I should send four men with you. But I know that you could make a pretty good defence alone, if you had anything to fight with."

"Of course if you insist in that way, I must. I utterly refuse to be followed about by soldiers. It is too ridiculous. Have you got a knife? Something that is easy to carry —"

"Two or three," answered Orsino. "There is a very nice bowie knife—one of those American things made in England. It is convenient, for it has a cross-hilt and a leathern sheath."

He rose from the table and opened a drawer in an old-fashioned press, from which he produced the weapon in question.

"There is a saddler in Rome who gets these things," he observed, showing it to his brother. "You see it is really a dagger, for there is no spring. It is made solid and straight and would go through anything, I should think. Look at the thickness of the back of the blade, will you? And the point is extremely fine. You could engrave with it, and yet it is as strong as the rest."

Ippolito turned the knife over and over.

"At all events it will be useful in cutting up the bits of leather I use for mending the old organ," he observed. "My pocket knife is of hardly any use."

He sheathed the knife blade and dropped it into the deep side pocket of his cassock.

"Imagine me carrying a bowie knife!" he exclaimed, still inclined to laugh.

"Imagine the feelings of Francesco Pagliuca this afternoon, if he had thought you had one in your pocket, when you were behind him and twisting his collar." Orsino smiled grimly.

"My hands were good enough for such a beast," answered Ippolito, in a tone of disgust.

Thus it was that Ippolito began to go armed, much against his will, for he took his profession as a priest and a man of peace seriously. Orsino was not even then half satisfied, and intended before long to try and persuade him to carry a revolver instead of the knife.

But up at Santa Vittoria there was much talk of another sort on that evening. As generally happens in such cases in Sicily, the carabinieri and the soldiers, though on the lookout for Francesco Pagliuca, were in profound ignorance of the fact that he was now lodging for the second night at the house of Taddeo the grocer, though there was now hardly a man in the village who did not know it. The soldiers in Sicily are matched

as one to a thousand against a whole population of the most reticent people in the world, bound together by that singular but half-defined force, which is the mafia. Knowing the country perfectly and well acquainted with the unchanging hours of the regular patrols in the neighbourhood, Francesco might have stayed ten days in Santa Vittoria in spite of the soldiers, even if he had been guilty of the crimes which he did not at all mean to commit. Not a human being would have informed against him, and if anyone had betrayed him, the betrayer's own life would not have been worth much. They did not think any the better of him, nor any the worse, because he was innocent of any misdeed. He was a part of the idea of the mafia, a born Sicilian, who, somehow, had been obliged to give up his birthright to Romans, who were as much foreigners to the people of Santa Vittoria as Englishmen could have been. It was their duty, to a man, for Sicily's sake and their own, to stand by him as a Sicilian against all authority whatever. Besides, they knew him, the Romans had killed his brother, whom they had also known, and both he and his had always helped the outlaws against the government. The peasants remembered and told their children how the Corleone brothers had once led a dozen carabinieri about the hills for two days in search of the brigands, taking good care not to catch them. It was not probable that the soldiers

should ever get any information against such popular persons, except by stratagem or accident.

And now Francesco sat in a long upper room at the back of Taddeo's house, bathing his sore face with vinegar and water and telling his story to the grocer and his brother, in his own way. And in many humble little houses, the men were talking in low tones, telling each other how the 'priest of the Saracinesca' had fallen upon Francesco Pagliuca after they had quarrelled over Ferdinando's grave, and had treacherously twisted his collar and beaten him before he could get his gun into his hand. And they discussed the matter in whispers. And one man, who had loved Ferdinando, said nothing, but went out quietly from his house and walked down over the black lands and set fire to three haystacks on the Camaldoli estate, because the corn was not yet harvested, and there was nothing else to burn at that time of year. In the morning everyone heard of it and was glad, but no one ever knew who had set fire to the hay, for the man who did it did not tell his wife.

But neither did Concetta tell her father truly what had happened to her. She had been at the cemetery, she said, and the two gentlemen had met, the priest and the layman, and had quarrelled, she knew not about what, and the priest of the Saracinesca had caught Francesco Pagliuca unawares by the neck. So her story corresponded

with that of the peasants and with that of Francesco.

For two reasons she could not tell her father the truth. If he had known it, he would never have allowed her to leave the village alone again. And he would most certainly have risen from the table, and would have gone straight to Taddeo's house, where Francesco was, to kill him at once, though Don Atanasio was an old man, having married very late in life. It was true that since it was all over, and she had cast the blame upon Ippolito, the hatred of her offended maidenhood for her cowardly assailant was slowly and surely waking; and her white cheeks blushed scarlet as though they had been struck, when she thought of it all. But it was better that her father should not know, and she held her peace. It was hardest of all to feel that she had almost had Francesco's rifle in her hands, and that if he had not assailed her, there might by this time have been one Saracinesca less in the world.

It would have done her good to see the haystacks flaming down in the valley, and it would have brought a smile of satisfaction to her tragic face to have heard what the peasants were whispering to one another in all the little houses of the village that night.

No one said that it was a shame for an armed man to have been beaten by an unarmed priest.

They felt personally injured by what they called the treachery of the latter in choking his antagonist, and they softly cursed the Romans, and vowed to hurt them if they could. Generations of their fathers had known generations of the Corleone, had been ground and rack-rented by them, and had resisted their extortions with a cunning that had often been successful. But now that the Pagliuca had lost their birthright, that was all forgotten in the fact that they were Sicilians, injured by Romans. No one said in defence of the Saracinesca that San Giacinto had paid the Pagliuca more than twice the actual value of Camaldoli. In the eyes of the peasants their old masters had been ignominiously ejected from their home by Romans, and Ferdinando had done a brave and honourable deed in trying to resist them. It was the duty of every good Sicilian to stand by the Pagliuca against the Romans and against the authorities, come what might. If this young Roman priest had the overbearing courage to beat a Pagliuca on the high road in broad daylight, what might not his tall, black-browed brother be expected to do, or what deed of violence might not follow at the hands of the grey-haired giant who had been at Camaldoli, and who had momentarily terrorized everyone? No one's life or property was safe while the Saracinesca remained in the country. And they meant to remain. They

had cut down the brush around the house so that no one could creep up with a rifle under safe cover, and they had strengthened the gate and were restoring the tower. They had turned the monastery into a barrack for the carabinieri, and had quartered a company of infantry in the village. Their power and their evident influence in Rome, since they had obtained troops for their protection, made them ten times more hateful to men who hated all authority. They wished that Ippolito had wounded Francesco slightly with some weapon. Then he might have been arrested, and there was not a man in the village who would have said a word in his favour. Many would have perjured themselves to testify against him, in the hope that he might really be sent to prison. The fact that he was a priest went for nothing. He was not their own priest, and more than one churchman had been in trouble in Sicily, before now.

CHAPTER XXVII

FRANCESCO was no more able to understand Concetta's conduct than Ippolito himself. He had expected a very different termination to the affair, for he knew well enough that if the four peasants had caught him as Ippolito had, they would very probably have torn him limb from limb, in the most literal and barbarous sense of the word, in spite of any sympathy they might have felt for his family until then. He vaguely understood that Concetta had saved him for his dead brother's sake, and out of hatred for the Saracinesca; but there was a sort of reckless self-sacrifice in her act which it was beyond his cowardice and selfishness to comprehend. He rarely addressed the saints, but he inwardly thanked them for his safety as he rode round the outskirts of the village and the back of Taddeo's house. He was still in a tremor of fear, but he knew that he could easily twist and exaggerate the story of the ignominious beating he had received, and thereby account for his pallor and his nervousness. He knew that anything would be believed against the Saracinesca.

It would be hard to give a single reason for his having chosen to come up to Santa Vittoria to find a lodging, when he had left Rome in order to see Aliandra in Randazzo. His timidity might have had something to do with his decision, making him prefer the village where he was sure of finding friends, whatever he might do, to the large town where there was no one upon whom he could count. He had also told Basili, when he had been to see him, that he had business in Santa Vittoria. Vaguely, too, he guessed that Tebaldo might know where he was and follow him. But he had not the slightest intention of doing any harm to the Saracinesca, of whom, in his heart, he had always been afraid.

As soon as Concetta had spoken, he had known that he was safe, though it was long before the effect of his fright had passed off. After what she had said, he knew that no one in Santa Vittoria would believe any statement which Ippolito might make about the encounter, and he set himself to enlarge upon the impression she had given so as to show himself in the most advantageous light possible.

He was not injured, and his bruises, though painful, had not disfigured him, for Ippolito had struck him on the side of the head. As for his lip, he told Taddeo that Ippolito had at first picked up a stone and wounded him in the mouth with it.

Taddeo was ready to believe anything, and so was his brother, the fat sacristan, who had waited for Francesco in the bridle path until a late hour, and grievously lamented having missed the fight, for in spite of his fat and his odd smile and the cast in his eye, he was fond of fighting for its own sake, and no coward, except in the presence of what he believed to be supernatural and therefore irresistible.

Having eaten his supper and refreshed his spirits and nerves with some of Taddeo's strongest wine, Francesco went to sleep in the great, old-fashioned trestle bed, in sheets that smelt of lavender, though they were of coarse linen. And early in the morning he got up, feeling almost quite himself, and rode down to Randazzo in the early dawn. An uncomfortable sensation assailed him as he passed the wall of the cemetery, but he looked away and rode on, thinking of Aliandra Basili, and concocting the story he should tell her to account for his wounded lip. Of all things, he desired to make a good impression on her and her father, for he had come from Rome with the determination to marry her if he could.

It did not seem impossible, with Tebaldo out of the way, for she liked him, and Basili himself would think it a good thing for his daughter to marry a Pagliuca. Francesco's native cowardice had kept him out of the sort of daring mischief

which gives a man a bad character. He did not gamble, he did not drink, and he could have a title, of course, according to the southern custom of distributing that sort of social distinction through all the members of a family. Aliandra might do far worse, Basili thought; and though he knew that she had made up her mind to get Tebaldo if she could, he also knew Tebaldo well enough to judge that, as the head of his family, he would try to make an ambitious and rich marriage. He frankly told Francesco that he had little influence with his daughter, but that so far as he himself was concerned, he approved of the marriage. Francesco had an equal share of the small family fortune with his brother and sister, and it had been increased by the addition of Ferdinando's, since the latter had left no will. In former times Basili had warned his daughter against the brothers, but their existence had changed since then. They now had a social position, and friends in Rome, and were altogether much more deserving of consideration.

Francesco found the notary's broken leg a distinct advantage in his courtship; for Basili was, of course, helpless to move, in his room upstairs, and when the young man had paid him a visit, he and Aliandra had the house to themselves without fear of interruption. Then the two could stay as long as they pleased in the sitting-room below, with the

blinds half closed and hooked together, and it was a cool and quiet place just so high above the street that people could not look in as they passed along outside.

Aliandra had been flattered by the young man's pursuit, as was natural, but she had by no means given up the idea of marrying Tebaldo. She would have preferred that Francesco should not come all the way down from Santa Vittoria every day, but she could not refuse to see him when he came. She had temporarily returned, with a good deal of pleasure and amusement, to the primitive social state in which she had been brought up, and she was no longer able to tell a servant to say that she was not at home. Gesualda, the maid of all work, would not have understood any such order. Besides, Francesco always made a pretence of having come to see how Basili was doing, and invariably went upstairs to the latter's room, as soon as he entered the house. In the middle of the day he went to the inn for his dinner, because Aliandra dined with her father, but an hour later he returned and stayed until it was time for him to ride away in order to reach Santa Vittoria before dark. It was a long ride, and as he rode the same horse every day he saved his animal's strength as much as possible.

To-day, everything happened as usual. At the accustomed hour he appeared, put up his horse in

Basili's stable beside the notary's brown mare, flicked the dust from his boots and gaiters, and went in to see Aliandra and her father. The stable was in a little yard on one side of the house, entered by a wooden gate from the street, and accessible also from the house itself by a side door which led down three or four steps.

The notary was in a good humour, for the doctor said that he was doing well, and hoped to get him on his feet again in a shorter time than had at first been expected. He was beginning to like Francesco because the young man took some pains to amuse him, having an object to gain, and treated him with even more deference than the principal notary of a provincial town had a right to expect. It was amusing to be told about Rome, and to hear a great many things explained which had always been more or less a mystery to one who had never left the island. It was pleasant, too, to hear of his daughter's triumphs from one who had assisted at them all, and who now spoke with the authority of a man of the world, representing the opinion of the Roman aristocracy.

Now and then, when Francesco spoke of some especial passage in an opera by which Aliandra had raised a storm of enthusiasm, Basili would ask her what the music was like; and then, without effort or affectation, as though it was a pleasure to her, her splendid voice burst out, true and clear

and fresh, and sang what the old man wished to hear. Then the peasants and people passing through the street would stop to listen, and even the ugly Gesualda, peeling potatoes or shelling pease in the kitchen, paused in her work and had a vision of something beautiful and far above her poor comprehension.

On this morning, Francesco did his best to be agreeable, though his head ached and his lip was swollen. He refused to say much about the latter. Aliandra was sure to hear, in a day or two, the story which the peasants would tell each other about the affair, and which would certainly redound to his credit. He said that he had met with a slight accident in going home, and when Aliandra pressed him for an account of it, he said that it was nothing worth mentioning and turned the subject quickly. He did not wish to let her know that he had been worsted by a Saracinesca. The peasants would be sure to concoct a story of treachery, much more to his own glory than anything he could put together, and which would probably contain a number of details that might not agree with those of his own invention.

Aliandra did not ask any more questions about it, even after they had gone downstairs and sat talking in the front room as usual. Her feeling for him had not changed at all. She was not in love with him any more than before she had left

Rome, but he still attracted her in the same rather unaccountable way, and she never felt quite sure of what he might do or say when they were alone together. Yet she felt safer in being with him in her father's house than she had felt in Rome, even under the protection of the Signora Barbuzzi.

He pressed her to marry him, at every meeting. Sometimes she laughed at him, sometimes she gave reasons why she could not accept him, sometimes she refused to listen altogether, and told him that he must go away if he could not talk more reasonably. But he was not easily discouraged; he knew how to make love better than Tebaldo, and after all, she liked him. Tebaldo, when with her, was apt to be either cross-tempered, or over-elated, and almost too much at his ease, for he was far too much moved by her mere presence, and by the atmosphere that surrounded her, to have control of his words and his looks, as he had when he was with Miss Slayback. He was often abrupt with Aliandra, and there are few outward faults which a woman dislikes more in a possible husband than abruptness. Yet Aliandra perpetually did her best to please Tebaldo. Francesco, on the other hand, used every means in his power to please her. It was no wonder that she liked him better than his brother. He had many of the ways which appeal to all women, and he was clever at hiding those

weaknesses which they despise quite as heartily as men can. A born coward not only fears danger, but fears, above all things, to show that he is afraid, and is keenly aware of anything, even in conversation, which can show him in his true light. If he is skilful, as well as cowardly, he will often succeed in deceiving brave men, who are the least suspicious, into the belief that he is as fearless as they. He finds it far easier to deceive women, who always attach much more importance to mere words than men do.

It was a warm and sultry afternoon, for the wind was from the southeast and had in it something of the suffocating fumes of the volcano over which it blew. The blinds were drawn together and hooked, in the Italian way, so as to let in plenty of air and little light. Aliandra had established herself on the stiff, old-fashioned sofa, putting up her feet, to be more at her ease, and Francesco sat beside her, close to the window, smoking and talking to her. It was very quiet. Now and then footsteps passed along the street outside, and sometimes the sound of peasants' voices was heard, discussing prices or some bit of local gossip. Francesco had eaten his dinner at the inn and had come back, Basili was dozing upstairs on his couch, and Gesualda, the maid of all work, was probably eating oranges in the kitchen, or asleep in her chair, with the cat on her knees.

There is nothing so peaceful in the whole world as the calm that descends on all things in the far south after the midday meal.

"This is better than Rome," observed Francesco, looking at Aliandra's handsome profile.

"For a change—yes," answered the singer, idly. "I should not care for it always."

"I can imagine that it might be dull, if I were alone."

Aliandra turned her head slowly and looked at him gravely for a moment. Then she smiled.

"If you were alone here," she said, "you would not have the excitement of taking care of a father with a broken leg, as I have."

"Excitement!" Francesco laughed. "Yes. I imagined what your existence would be like, so I came all the way from Rome to help you pass the time."

"How merciful! But I am grateful, for though I love my father dearly, a broken leg as a subject of conversation, morning, noon, and night, leaves something to be desired."

"I suppose the old gentleman is anxious about himself and talks about his leg all the time."

"When you are not there, he generally does. You do him good, I am sure."

"And so you are grateful to me for coming? Really?"

"Yes. What did you expect?"

"I would rather have less gratitude and more — what shall I say?"

"Anything you like — within certain limits!" Aliandra laughed softly.

"I might say too much, and that might offend you. Or too little, and that would certainly bore you."

"Could you not say just enough? Sometimes you say it very well. You can be tactful when you like."

"If I say that I should like more love, you will think it too much. If I say affection, it is too little, and must seem ridiculous."

Aliandra looked away from him, and rested her head against the hard back of the sofa for a moment.

"Why do you wish to marry me?" she asked suddenly, without turning to him. "You could do much better, I am sure."

"A man cannot do better than marry the woman he loves," said Francesco, softly.

"He can marry a woman who loves him," suggested Aliandra, laughing again.

"You cannot be serious very long," he retorted. "That is one reason why I love you. I hate serious people."

"I know you do, and that makes me doubt whether you can ever possibly be serious yourself. Now, to marry a man who is not serious —"

"Or a woman who is not," interrupted the young man.

"Is folly," said Aliandra, completing her sentence.

"Then neither you nor I should ever marry at all. That is the conclusion, evidently. But you began by asking me why I wish to marry you. I answered you. It is simple. I love you, and I have loved you almost since you were a child. You know something about my life in Rome, do you not? Have you ever heard that I cared for any other woman?"

"How should I hear? I am not of your world, and though you know how I live, I know nothing of what you do when you are not with me. How should I? Have I allowed any of the men in society to make my acquaintance? You speak as though I had friends who might be friends of yours, yet you know that I have none. What you say may be quite true, but I have no means of knowing."

"There is Tebaldo," said Francesco. "He knows all about me, and would not be likely to attribute to me any virtue which I do not possess. Has he ever told you that I was making love to anyone else?"

"No," answered Aliandra, thoughtfully. "That is true."

"And he hates me," observed Francesco. "He

would not lose a chance of abusing me, I am sure."

Aliandra made no answer at first, for what he said was quite true, though she did not care to admit it.

"You two are antipathetic to each other," she said at last, using the phrase because it was vague and implied no fault on either side. "You will never agree. I am sorry."

"Why should you care, whether we agree or not?"

"Because I like you both. I should wish you to be good friends."

"I am glad you include us both in one category," said Francesco. "You say that you like us both."

"Well — what of that?"

"There is a beautiful indifference about the expression. If Tebaldo is satisfied, I suppose that I should be. But I am not. I am made of different stuff. I cannot say, 'I love you' in one breath, and 'I will not marry you' in the next."

Aliandra started perceptibly and looked at him. He had a well-affected air of righteous contempt.

"I am in earnest," he continued, as she said nothing. "I do not know whether I could do better for myself, as you say, or not. I suppose you mean that I might marry the daughter of some Roman prince, with a dowry and sixteen quarter-

ings. Perhaps I might, for I have a good name of my own and an equal share of the property. I do not know and I do not care, and I shall certainly never try to make any such marriage, because I will either marry you or no one. I will not, I could not — nothing could induce me, neither fortune, nor position, nor anything else in the world.”

He had a very convincing way of speaking when he chose, and for the first time, perhaps, Aliandra hesitated and thought that she might do worse than accept him for a husband. She thought him handsome as he sat beside her, leaning forward a little and speaking earnestly, and she mistook his masculine vitality for real manliness, which is a common mistake with young women of little experience. Besides, he made no reservations, and Tebaldo made many. Yet it was hard to give up her dream of being a real princess, the wife of the head of an old family, for she was very ambitious in more ways than one. Francesco had said very much the same things before now, it was true, so that there was no novelty in them for her. But his importunity was beginning to make an impression upon her, as contrasted with his brother's determined avoidance of the question of marriage.

Still she said nothing, but her face betrayed her hesitation. He bent nearer to her, and spoke still more earnestly. There was no affectation in his speech now, for though his passions were evanes-

cent, they had all the heat of his vital temperament as long as they lasted. The fact that he had carefully weighed the advantage to be got by marrying an artist who had youth, beauty, honesty, a small but solid inheritance to expect, and very possibly fame and fortune in the near future, did not make him cold nor calculating when he was close beside that beauty and youth which had at first attracted him. Her eyes softened dreamily from time to time as he spoke, and she made no attempt to withdraw the hand of which he had taken possession.

He spoke quickly, warmly, eloquently, and without reserve, for he had nothing to conceal, and nothing to fear but her refusal. The words were not carefully chosen, nor the phrases very carefully turned, but they had the accent of sincerity, for his whole being was moved, as he spoke. They had also the merit of not being too few nor too short; for that is often a merit in women's eyes. A woman loves to hear the whole tale of love, from the beginning to the end, and feels herself somehow cheated by the short and broken sentences which are often all that a strong man can command, though his hand trembles and his lips are white with emotion which the weak never feel.

In the tender shadow of the half-darkened room, his eyes filled hers till she could not look away, and his speech grew softer and was broken by little

silences. Aliandra was falling under the spell of his voice, of the hour, of her own warm youth, and of his abundant vitality.

The blinds, hooked together against the bars, shook a little, perhaps with the sultry afternoon breeze, and all at once there was less light in the room. Aliandra moved a little, realizing that she was falling under the man's influence.

"But Tebaldo!" she exclaimed. "Tebaldo!" she repeated, still clinging to her long-cherished hope, as though she owed it a sort of allegiance for its own sake.

Francesco laughed softly, and pressed the hand he held.

"Tebaldo is going to marry the American girl with the great fortune," he said quietly. "You need not think of Tebaldo any more."

Again the blind creaked a little on its hinges. But Aliandra started at what Francesco said, and did not hear the window. She sat upright on the sofa.

"What American girl?" she asked. "I never heard of her. Has this been going on a long time?"

"About two months—" The blind creaked a third time, as he spoke.

"There is someone under the window!" cried Aliandra, lowering her voice and looking round.

"It is the wind," said Francesco, indifferently.

"The southeast wind blows up the street and shakes the blinds."

Aliandra leaned back again, and he took her hand once more.

"It is quite well known, in Rome," he continued. "The engagement is not actually announced, but it will be very soon. They say she has many millions, and she is very pretty—insignificant, fair with blue eyes, but pretty. He has done very well for himself."

Aliandra was silent. The news meant the absolute destruction of a project she had long hoped to realize, and with which she had grown familiar. But she knew, as it fell to pieces before her eyes, that she had never firmly believed in its success, and there was a sort of relief in feeling that she was freed from the task set her by her own ambition, while at the same time she was hurt by the disappointment of failure, and a sudden keen resentment against Tebaldo prompted her to yield to Francesco's entreaties on his own behalf. He held her hand and waited for her to speak.

The silence lasted long, for the notary's daughter was afraid of herself and of making up her mind hastily. The blind creaked again, more loudly than before, and she turned her head nervously.

"I am sure there is someone under the window!" she said. "I wish you would look!"

"I assure you it is only the wind," answered Francesco, as before.

"I know, but please look. I am nervous. The scirocco always makes me nervous."

"It is not the weather, Aliandra," he said softly, and smiling, with his eyes in hers. "You are not nervous, either. It is—it is—" he bent nearer to her face. "Do you know what it is?"

Though he was so near, forcing her with his eyes, he had no power over her now. She could not help looking anxiously over his shoulder at the hooked blinds. She was not listening to him.

"It is love," he said, and his red lips gave the word a sensuous sound, as they came nearer to her face.

She did not hear him. The rich colour in her face faded all at once, and then with a sharp cry she stood upright, pushing him away from her.

"I saw a hand on the window sill!" she exclaimed. "It is gone again."

Francesco rose also. He was annoyed at the untoward interruption, for he fancied that the hand must have belonged to some boy in the street, playing outside and climbing up a little way to jump down again, as boys do.

"It is ridiculous!" he said in a tone of irritation, and going to the window.

He looked down between the blinds that were ajar, expecting to see a peasant boy. Instead,

there was Tebaldo Pagliuca's face, yellow in the sun, as though he had a fever, and Tebaldo's bloodshot eyes looking up to his, and the thin, twisted lips smiling dangerously.

"Come outside," said Tebaldo, in an odd voice. "I want to speak with you."

But Francesco only heard the first words. His abject terror of his brother overcame him in an instant, and he almost ran into Aliandra's arms as he sprang back.

"It is Tebaldo!" he whispered. "Let him in. Keep him here, while I go away through the stable yard!"

And before she could answer, or realize exactly what he meant, he had left her standing alone in the middle of the room. In ten seconds he had made sure that the gate of the stable yard was fast inside, and he was saddling his horse. It was done in less than a minute, somehow. Then he listened, coming close to the gate. He heard Aliandra speaking with Tebaldo at the open window, a moment later he heard the street door open and close, and he knew that Tebaldo was in the house.

Very softly and quickly he unbolted the yard gate. He swung it wide, reckless of the noise it made, and in an instant he was in the saddle and galloping for his life up the deserted street. It was well that he had known the house thoroughly,

and that Aliandra had obeyed him and admitted Tebaldo at once.

She was braver than Francesco, by many degrees, though she was no heroine; but she was scared by the look in the man's face, as he entered without a word, and looked round the room slowly for his brother.

"Where is he?" he asked.

Before Aliandra could find any answer, the loud noise of clattering hoofs filled the room. Tebaldo was at the window almost before the sound had passed, and the thrust of his open hand smashed the fastenings so that the blinds flew wide open. He looked out and saw his brother galloping away.

He knew the house, too, for he had been in it many times, and he knew also that Basili's brown mare was a good beast, for the notary was a heavy man and often had to ride far. Without even glancing at Aliandra he turned to the door. But she was there before him, and held it closed, though she was frightened now.

"You shall not go," she tried to say.

"Shall not?" he laughed harshly, as his hands caught her.

He did not hurt her, for he loved her in his way, but a moment later she found herself turned round like a leaf in a storm, and the door had closed behind him. It seemed to her but a second more, and she had not been able to think what she should

do, when the sound of flying hoofs passed the window again. She ran to look out, and she saw the brown mare already far up the street. Tebaldo could ride, and he had not wasted time in saddling. Bareback he rode the mare with her halter for a bridle, as he had found her. Aliandra realized that he had no rifle. At all events he would have to overtake his brother in order to kill him, and Francesco had the start of him by several minutes.

He knew it, but he guessed what Tebaldo would do, and he kept his horse at full speed as the road began to wind upward to the black lands. He glanced behind him just before each turning, expecting to see his pursuer. But a clear start of four minutes meant a mile, at the pace he had ridden out of the town. He kept the horse to it, for he was riding for the wager of his life. But the animal had been put to it too suddenly after his feed, without as much as a preliminary walk or trot to the foot of the hill, and even in his terror Francesco saw that it would be impossible to keep the pace much longer. But he could save distance, if he must slacken speed, if he followed the footpath by which the peasants had made short cuts between each bend of the road and the next. They were hard and safe in the heat, and his horse could trot along them fairly well, and even canter here and there. And then, when he was forced to take the high road for few hundred yards, he

could break once more into a stretching gallop. If he could but reach that turn, just beyond the high hill, where Ferdinando's friend had once waited for San Giacinto, he believed that he could elude Tebaldo in the black lands.

It was a terrible half-hour, and he gasped and sweated with fear, as he urged his horse up that last long stretch of the road which could not be avoided. His heart beat with the hoof-falls, and the sweat ran down upon his velvet coat, while he felt his hands so cold that it was an effort not to drop the reins. But the beast had got his wind at last, and galloped steadily up the hill.

It was growing suddenly dark, and there was a feverish yellow light in the hot air. A vast thunderstorm was rolling over Etna, and another had risen to meet it from the west, hiding the lowering sun. Only overhead the air was calm and clear. The first clap of the thunder broke in the distance, and went rolling and echoing away from the volcano to the inland mountains. As he reached the top of the hill, Francesco felt the big drops of rain in his face like a refreshment, though they were warm. The thunder pealed out again from the mountain's side with a deafening explosion. He turned in his saddle and looked back.

The road was straight and long, and he could see far. Tebaldo was in sight at last, almost lying on the mare's bare back as she breasted the hills,

his hand along her neck, his voice near her ear while she stretched her long brown body out at every stride.

Francesco's teeth chattered as he spurred his horse for another wild effort. He could break from the road now, just before the wide curve it made to the left, and he knew the bridle paths and all the short cuts and by-ways through the black lands, as few men knew them except that one man, his brother, who was behind him. In his haste to escape he had left his rifle in Basili's hall. It was so much the less weight for his horse to carry, but it left him defenceless, and he knew that Tebaldo must be armed.

The storm broke and the rain came down in torrents. His horse almost slipped in jumping the ditch to get off the main road, but recovered himself cleverly, and long before Tebaldo had reached the top of the hill Francesco was out of sight. He might have felt safe then, from almost any other pursuer. But he knew Tebaldo, and now and then his teeth chattered. He told himself that he was chilled by the drenching rain, but in his heart he knew it was fear. Death was behind him, gaining on him, overtaking him, and he felt a terrible weakness in all his bones, as though they were softened and limp like a skeleton made of ropes.

It was hard to think, and yet he had to ease his

mind. Tebaldo was lighter than he, and he rode without saddle or bridle. To take the shortest way through the black lands was to be surely overtaken in the long run. It might be best to take the longest, and perhaps Tebaldo might get before him, and give him a chance to turn back to Randazzo.

But as he looked down at the path his heart sank. The heavy rain had already softened the ground in places and his horse's hoofs made fresh tracks. There was no mistaking them. There was only one way, then, and it must be a race, for only speed could save him. Whichever way he might turn in and out of the fissures and little hollows, he must leave a trail in the wet, black ashes, which anyone could follow.

Don Taddeo's best horse was one of the best horses in that part of the country, as Francesco knew, and more than a match for the notary's brown mare, had other things been alike. But there was the difference of weight against him, and, moreover, Tebaldo was the better rider.

There was less than three-quarters of a mile between them now, but if he could keep the pace, that would do. He followed the shortest path, which was also the best because it was naturally the one most used by travellers. The rain fell in torrents, and the air was dusky and lurid. Again and again the great forked lightnings flashed down the side of the mountain, and almost at the instant

the terrible thunder crashed through the hissing rain. Francesco felt as though each peal struck him bodily in the back, between the shoulders, and his knees shook with terror as he tried to press them to the saddle, and he bent down as if to avoid a shot or a blow, while his ears strained unnaturally for the dreaded sound of hoofs behind. Yet he scarcely dared to turn and look back, lest while he looked his horse might hesitate, or turn aside to another path through the black wilderness. Under the lurid light the yellow spurge had a horribly vivid glow, growing everywhere in big bunches among the black stones and out of the blacker soil. It almost dazzled him, as he rode on, always watching the path lest he should make a mistake and be lost.

Then the wind changed in a moment and came up behind him in gusts, and brought to his ears the sound of terror, the irregular beat of a horse's hoofs, cantering, pacing, trotting, according to the ground. It was fearfully near, he thought. He had just then his choice of taking to the road again for half a mile or more, or of following the bridle path that turned off amongst the spurge and the stones. There was a broad, deep ditch, and the rain had made the edges slippery and there was a drop of several feet, and little space to take off. It was a dangerous leap, but the greater fear devoured the less, and Francesco did not hesitate,

but put the good horse at it. It would be a relief to get a stretching gallop along the road again.

The horse cleared it well, and thundered up the highway, as glad as his rider to be out of the intricate paths again. Francesco breathed more freely, and presently turned in his saddle as he galloped, and looked back. He could see nothing, but every now and then a gust of wind brought the sound of hoofs to him. Just as he neared the end of the half-mile stretch he distinctly saw Tebaldo come up to the leap. The rain had ceased for a moment, and in the grey air he could see tolerably well how the brown mare took off. For an instant he gazed, absolutely breathless. Horse and rider disappeared into the ditch together, for the mare had not cleared it. She might be injured, she might be killed, and Tebaldo with her. With a wild welling up of hope, Francesco galloped along the road, already half sure that the race was won and that he could reach a safe place in time.

The highway was level now, for two or three miles, over the high yoke, below which, on the other side, Camaldoli lay among the trees. He settled down once more to a long and steady gallop, and the going was fairly good, for the volcanic stuff used in making the road drank up the rain thirstily and was just softened by it without turning to mud. His terror was subsiding a little.

But all at once from far behind came the regular,

galloping, tramping tread of the horse his brother was riding. He turned as though he had been struck, and there, a mile behind him, was a dark, moving thing on the road. They had not been injured, they had not been killed, they were up and after him again. And again his teeth chattered and his hands grew cold on the reins.

The entrance to the avenue of Camaldoli was in sight, and he set his teeth to keep them still in his head. It was half a mile from the entrance to the house, and little more than that to Santa Vittoria. But if he turned into the entrance, Tebaldo would cut across the fields and might catch him under the trees, caring little who might be there to see. It was safer to make for Santa Vittoria.

He passed the turn of the road at a round pace, and the good horse breasted the hill bravely. But on the smooth highway, the difference in weight began to tell very soon. Tebaldo was clearly in sight again now, stretching himself along the mare's body, his head on her neck, his voice close to her ear, riding like vengeance in a whirlwind, gaining at every stride.

Francesco's horse was almost spent, and he knew it. He had spurs and used them cruelly, and the poor beast struggled to gallop still, while the lean brown mare gained on him. The sun was low among the lurid clouds, and sent a pale level glare across the desolate land.

Before the cemetery gate, her black clothes and her black shawl drenched with the thunderstorm and clinging to her, Concetta sat in her accustomed place, bent low. Francesco scarcely saw her, as he rode up the last stretch for his life. But, as he passed her, his horse stumbled a little. Francesco thought he shied at the black figure, but it was not that. Four, five, six strides more, and the brave beast stumbled again, staggered as Francesco sprang to the ground, and then rolled over, stone dead, in the middle of the road.

Francesco did not glance at him as he lay there, but ran like a deer up the last few yards of the hill. The little church was just on the other side, and it might be open. Tebaldo was not two hundred yards behind him, and had seen all and was ready, and the lean mare came tearing on. She took the dead horse's body in her desperate stride, just as Francesco burst into the church.

With all his strength he tried to force the bolt of the lock across the door inside, for the key was outside where Ippolito had left it when he had entered. He could not move it, and he heard the thunder of hoofs without. If Tebaldo had not seen him enter, the mare would gallop past the closed door to the gate of the town. In wild fear he waited the ten seconds that seemed an age. The clattering ceased suddenly, and someone was forcing the door in behind him. Francesco's lips

moved, but he could not cry out. He ran from the door up the aisle.

When Tebaldo had killed him, on the steps of the altar, he sheathed the big knife, with which he had done the deed at one blow, and instantly dropped it through the old gilded grating under the altar itself, behind which the bones of the saint lay in a glass casket. No one would ever look for it there.

As though the fever that had burned him were suddenly quenched in the terrible satisfaction of murder, the natural colour returned to his face for a moment, and he grew cold. Then all at once he realized what he had done, and he knew that he must escape from the church before anyone surprised him. He turned away from the altar and found himself face to face with Ippolito Saracinesca, who had been at work at the back of the organ, while he was waiting for the fat sacristan as usual, and had come down the winding stairs as soon as he had heard the noise of running feet, without even going to the front of the loft to see who was there.

Tebaldo stood stock-still, facing the priest while one might have counted a score. He knew him well and was known to Ippolito. But Ippolito could not see who it was that lay dead across the steps, for the face was downwards. Tebaldo looked at the churchman's calm and fearless eyes

and knew that he was lost, if he could not silence him. Before Ippolito spoke, for he was too much surprised and horror-struck to find anything to say, and was rather thinking of what he ought to do, the Sicilian was on his knees, grasping his sleeve with one hand and crossing himself with the other.

He began the words of the Confession. A moment more and he was confessing to Ippolito as to a priest, and under the sacred seal of silence, the crime of having slain his brother. Ippolito could not stop him, for he had a scruple. He could not know that the man did not at once truly repent of what he had done, and in that case, as a priest, he was bound to hear and to keep silence for ever. Tebaldo knew that, and went to the end, and said the last Latin words even while getting on his feet again.

"I cannot give you absolution," said the young priest. "The case is too grave for that. But your confession is safe with me."

Tebaldo nodded, and turned away. He walked firmly and quickly to the door, went out and closed it behind him. He had already made up his mind what to do. He met the fat sacristan less than twenty paces from the church. He had known him all his life, and he stopped him, asking him where he was going. The man explained.

"Don Ippolito will not need you to blow the organ to-day," said Tebaldo, gravely. "He has just killed my brother in the church. I have turned the key on him, and am going to fetch the carabineers."

The fearful lie was spoken with perfect directness and clearness. The man started, stared at Tebaldo, and grew pale with excitement, but he could not believe his ears till Tebaldo had repeated the words. Then he spoke.

"We thought he had killed him yesterday afternoon by the cemetery," he said. "And now he has really done it! Madonna! Madonna! And another of them killed Don Ferdinando!"

"What is that about the cemetery?" asked Tebaldo. "Tell me as we go, for I am in a hurry."

"It is better that I stay," said the man. "He knows the lock and he may be able to slip the bolt from the inside, for he is very strong. He almost killed Don Francesco last night with his hands and only a stone he picked up."

He told Tebaldo in a few words the story which the peasants had already invented.

"I am glad you have told me," said Tebaldo. "It explains this horrible murder. I will go for the carabineers at once. There is no more time to be lost. Stay here and watch the door."

He knew he could trust the man to do his worst

against a Roman, and he walked rapidly into the town.

Ippolito watched Tebaldo until the door closed behind him. He was a very honourable as well as a very good man, and though as a priest he felt that he must give the murderer the benefit of a doubt, he felt as a man that the doubt could not really exist, and that Tebaldo had intentionally put him under the seal of confession in order to destroy his power of testifying in the case. The clever treachery was revolting to him.

He turned to look at the dead man, suddenly hoping that there might be some life left in him after all. He went and knelt beside him on the step of the altar and turned his body over so that it lay on its back. He felt the sort of pitying repulsion for anything dead which every sensitively organized man or woman feels, but he told himself that it was his duty to make sure that Francesco was not alive.

There was no doubt about that. Even he, in his inexperience, could not mistake the look in the wide-open, sightless eyes. He shuddered when he remembered how only twenty-four hours ago he had struck the poor dead head again and again with all his might, and he thanked Heaven that he had not struck harder and more often. He looked for the wound. It was on the left side low down in the breast, and must have gone to the

heart at once. There was blood on both his hands, but very little had run down upon the steps.

He got his handkerchief from the side pocket of his cassock, and started as he felt there the sheathed knife which Orsino had made him carry. There was no water in the church, except a little holy water, and he could not defile that, so he wiped his hands as well as he could on his handkerchief and put the latter back into his pocket.

Suddenly he realized that he ought to be doing something, and he stood up, and looked about in hesitation. He asked himself how far the secret of confession bound him, and whether it could be regarded as a betrayal to call the authorities at once. Someone might have seen Tebaldo leave the church, and to give the alarm at once might be to fasten suspicion upon him. The rule about the secrecy of confession is very strict.

The sacristan might be expected to appear at any moment, too. Ippolito looked at his watch and wondered why the man had not come already. He was in great difficulty, for the case was urgent. Being alone, too, he did not like to shut up the church, leaving the dead man there alone. But he was sure that the sacristan would come in a few moments. It was more than half an hour since he had sent the lame boy to find him. It was wiser to wait for him and send him for the doctor and the carabinieri.

He paced up and down before the altar rail rather nervously, glancing every now and then at the dead man. But the sacristan did not come. He thought it would be charitable to straighten out the lifeless limbs and cross the hands upon the breast, and he went up the steps and did so. When it was finished, he found more blood on his hands, and again rubbed away as much as he could with his handkerchief. Once more he paced the stone floor. Then he remembered that in his excitement he had not even said a prayer, and he knelt awhile by the rail, repeating some of the psalms for the dead, in a low voice.

He rose and walked again, and his eyes fell on the queer words in worn, raised letters on the slab in the floor — ‘*Esca Pagliuca pesca Saracen*’ — and again he was struck by the way in which his own name, or something very like it, could be made out of the letters.

He walked down the church, intending to look out and see whether the sacristan were coming. He was surprised to find the door locked. Then, all at once, he heard the sound of many voices, speaking loudly and coming nearer. He could distinguish his own name, spoken again and again in angry tones by someone with a loud voice.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IPPOLITO moved a step backwards when he heard the key turned in the lock, for the door opened inwards. It swung wide, a moment later, and he faced a multitude of angry eyes. There was Tebaldo pointing to him with an evil smile on his thin lips, and his lids falling at the angles like those of a vulture that scents death. There was the young red-haired lieutenant of infantry, gazing sharply at him; there was a corporal, with three or four of the foot-carabineers in their forage-caps. These represented the law. But pressing upon them, around them, and past them, was also a throng of angry men, and with them half a dozen women, and some children, even little ones, and the lame boy who waited every day to call the sacristan, and the fat sacristan himself, with the disturbing cast in his eye. In the background, just within the door when all had entered, and leaning against the doorpost, stood Concetta, her shawl falling back from her head, her splendid eyes gleaming with insanity.

“Take him,” said Tebaldo, harshly. “There lies

my brother, before the altar, and his blood is on this man's hands."

Then came a discordant chorus of cries and curses from the crowd.

"Take the priest of the Saracinesca! Handcuff him! Put him in chains! Curses on his soul, and on the souls of his dead!"

"He tried to kill him with a stone yesterday!"

"He has done it to-day, the assassin!"

"Let us burn him alive! Let us tear him to pieces! Death to the Roman!"

"Let me get my hands upon his face!" screamed a dishevelled woman.

And a child, that stood near, spit at him.

Ippolito had stepped backwards before them and faced them, pale and staring in amazement and horror. He could not understand, at first. The hideous treachery was altogether beyond his belief. Yet Tebaldo's outstretched hand pointed at him, and it was Tebaldo's voice that was bidding the soldiers take him. Their faces were impenetrable. Only the young Piedmontese officer, used to another world in the civilized north, betrayed in his expression the sort of curiosity one sees in the looks of people who are watching wild beasts in a cage.

"You had better clear the church," he said to the carabineers. "This confusion is unseemly."

He was not their officer, but they at once began

to obey him. The crowd resisted a little, when the big men pushed them back with outstretched arms, as one gathers canes in the brake, to bind them together before cutting them off at the roots.

"They will let him go, like his brother," growled an old man, fiercely.

"They will send him to Rome, and then let him go free, because he is a Roman," said the crooked little carpenter.

And the little boy spat at Ippolito again, and dodged the hand of one of the soldiers and ran out. With protesting cries, and with many curses and many evil threats, the people allowed themselves to be pushed out without any violence.

"I am the sacristan," said the fat man, objecting; and they let him stay.

"I am Concetta," said the dark girl, gravely.

"Let her stay," advised the sacristan. "She saw the priest beat him yesterday."

Ippolito had not spoken a word. He had folded his arms, and stood waiting for the confusion to end. He was fearless, but he could not realize, at first, that he might be seriously accused of the murder, and he believed that he should be set free very soon. He understood the treachery now, however, and his clear eyes fixed themselves on Tebaldo's face.

When the church was cleared, and the door fastened, the corporal stepped up to him. Two

of his men had gone to examine the body, and to search for the weapon.

"You are accused of having killed that gentleman," said the corporal, quietly. "He is quite dead, and you are in the church with him. There is blood on both your hands. What have you to say?"

"I did not kill him," said Ippolito, simply. "When I saw that he was lying before the altar, I examined him, to see if he were dead. That is how I soiled my hands."

The two men came back from the altar. They had ascertained that Francesco had been killed by a knife-thrust, but had not found the knife.

"I regret that I must search you," said the corporal, in his quiet, determined voice.

"You will find a knife in my pocket," answered Ippolito, very pale, for he saw how all evidence must go against him.

The corporal looked up sharply, for he himself was surprised. Ippolito emptied his pockets, not wishing to submit to the indignity of being searched. He at once produced the sheathed bowie knife and the handkerchief, which was deeply dyed with blood and not yet dry. Some of it had stained the yellow leathern sheath in several places. The corporal drew out the weapon, which was bright and spotless, returned it to its sheath, and then held up the handkerchief by two corners. It is very easy

to wipe blood from burnished steel, provided it is done instantly, and the corporal had a wide experience of such matters. He concluded that Ippolito might have cleaned the knife with the pocket handkerchief. He handed both objects to one of his men.

Tebaldo's lids had quivered and his lips had moved a little as he looked on. It seemed as though some supernatural power were conspiring in his favour against his enemy. But he said nothing. The young officer opened his blue eyes very wide, and thoughtfully twisted his small, red moustache.

Ippolito emptied the other pocket of his cassock, and produced a small volume of the Breviary, containing the offices for the spring, a little flexible morocco pocket-book, containing a few bank-notes, and an ivory-handled penknife.

"It is enough," said the corporal. "These things do not interest us. Your name," he added, taking out his note-book and pencil.

"Ippolito Saracinesca."

"Son of whom?"

"Of Don Giovanni Saracinesca, Prince of Sant' Ilario, of Rome."

"Age?"

"Twenty-seven years."

"Your occupation?"

"A priest."

"Present residence?"

"Rome. I am staying with my brother at Camaldoli."

The corporal noted the answers rapidly in his book, and returned it to his pocket, buttoning his tunic again. Then he was silent for a moment.

"You have already given your account of the affair," he said presently to Tebaldo. "It is not necessary to repeat it. But this girl — what has she to say?" He turned to Concetta.

Gravely, but with gleaming eyes, the pale and beautiful girl came forward and faced Ippolito.

"Yesterday at sunset I was at the gate of the cemetery," she said. "This man's brother, who lives at Camaldoli, shot this Don Tebaldo's brother, to whom I was betrothed, and he is buried in the cemetery. Therefore, I go every day to the gate, to visit him. Yesterday Don Francesco came up the road and was speaking to me. He who lies there dead was talking with me but yesterday. God give his soul peace and rest. Then this priest, coming down from Santa Vittoria, fell upon him from behind treacherously, and choked him by the collar, and beat him upon the head, so that he fell down fainting. But certain peasants came by that way and lifted him up and took him into our village, but the priest went down to Camaldoli. This I saw, and this I tell you. And now two Saracinesca have killed two Pagliuca."

She ceased speaking, and her white hands drew her shawl over her head, for she was in church, where a woman's head should be covered.

"Do you admit the truth of what this girl says?" asked the corporal, turning to Ippolito.

"It is true that I beat Francesco Pagliuca with my hands yesterday afternoon."

"Do you not admit also that you killed him today, in this church, with that knife? Don Tebaldo testifies that he saw you do it."

The young priest drew himself up to his height, and his clear gaze riveted itself on Tebaldo's half-veiled eyes. The good man faced the bad silently for many seconds.

"Did you testify that you saw me kill your brother?" asked Ippolito, at last.

"I did, and I shall repeat my testimony at the proper time," answered Tebaldo, steadily.

But under the clear, high innocence that silently gave him the lie, his eyelids drooped more and more, till he looked down.

"Do you admit that you killed him?" asked the corporal again.

"I did not kill him."

"But you must necessarily know who did, if you did not," said the soldier. "The sacristan says that you sent a boy for him some time ago. The man is only just dead, as my men have seen. You must have been in the church when he was

killed, and you must have seen the man who did it."

Ippolito had not seen the deed done, but he had seen the murderer. It would be hard to answer on the one point and not on the other, and by the very smallest slip he might unintentionally say something which might end in the betrayal of the secret told him in confession. He therefore kept silent.

"You say nothing? You insist in saying nothing?" asked the corporal.

"I say nothing beyond what I have said. I did not do it."

"And you," continued the soldier, addressing Tebaldo, "you testify that you saw this man do it?"

"I do. Those things would bear evidence without me," added Tebaldo, pointing to the knife and the bloody handkerchief, which latter one of the soldiers held by a single corner in order not to soil his fingers. "Those things, and the man's hands," he added. "Moreover, his brother killed my other brother, as everyone knows, and he himself admits that he assaulted Francesco only last night. You can hardly hesitate about arresting him, corporal. The fact that he is a Roman and that we are Sicilians is hardly a sufficient defence, I think."

The corporal understood that he had no choice. He was a very sensible man and had seen much service in Sicily, and whenever there was bloodshed he was inclined to attribute the crime to a

Sicilian rather than to an Italian. He liked Ippolito's face and innocent eyes and would have given much to feel that he had a right to leave him at liberty. But he had to admit that the evidence was overpoweringly strong against the accused. At first sight, indeed, it seemed perfectly absurd to suppose that a young churchman of a sensitive organization and educated in a high state of civilization should suddenly, wilfully, and violently stab to death such a man as the carabinieri believed Francesco Pagliuca to have been; a man against whom the authorities had been warned, as being likely on the contrary to do the Saracinesca some injury, if he could; a man who had grown up in a wild part of Sicily, imbued with the lawless ideas of the mafia; a man, in fact, who though a nobleman by birth was looked upon as a 'maffeuso,' and whose brother had certainly had friendly relations with outlaws. It was not to be denied that the carabinieri and the soldiers were all strongly prejudiced in favour of the Saracinesca, as against the Corleone.

At the same time, the evidence was overwhelming, and was the more so because Ippolito was so obstinately silent and would say nothing in self-defence beyond making a general denial of the charge. In his difficulty the corporal turned to the officer of the line, both as his military superior and as a man of higher education than himself.

He wanted support. He begged the lieutenant to speak with him in private for a moment, and they moved away together to one of the side chapels.

Ippolito folded his arms and paced up and down before the carabinieri, in profound and distressing perplexity. Tebaldo leaned against a pillar and watched him with evil satisfaction. Concetta went and knelt down, facing the altar, by a pillar on the opposite side, and the fat sacristan stood still in the background, watching everybody.

The lieutenant shook his head from time to time while the corporal went over the case.

"For my part," said the officer, at last, "I will wager my honour as a soldier that the priest did not kill him. But you will have to arrest him, not because of the feeling in the village, but simply because the evidence appears to be so strong. There is something here which we do not understand. But soldiers are not called upon to understand. It is always our duty to act to the best of our ability on what we can see. Understanding such things belongs to the law. I advise you to take him to your quarters and get him away from here to-night. He will make no resistance, of course."

The corporal was satisfied, though he did not like the duty, and he came back to Ippolito.

"It is my duty to arrest you," he said, in a tone which expressed some respect and much annoyance.

Ippolito had stopped in his walk and turned when he heard the soldier's footsteps behind him.

"You must do what you think right," he said calmly. "I am ready."

The corporal gave an order to his men and requested Ippolito to walk between them. Then he himself opened the door of the church.

A multitude of people had assembled outside, and there were now at least three times as many as had at first followed Tebaldo and the carabinieri. Many more were hurrying down from the gate, and there was the confused sound of many voices, talking angrily. But when Ippolito appeared there was silence for a moment. Then, from far back in the crowd, came a single cry, loud, high, derisive, and full of hatred.

"Assassin !"

The word rang out, and was immediately taken up and repeated by a hundred men and women, with a sort of concentrated fury that hissed out the syllables, as though each were a curse.

Ippolito faced the people calmly enough, walking between the four carabinieri, who marched two and two on each side of him, and the evening light shone full upon his clear-cut features and his innocent, brave eyes. He needed courage as well as innocence to bear him through the ordeal, for he knew that but for the handful of soldiers the crowd would have made short work of tearing him

to pieces in their fury. For once, the soldiers were on their side against the hated Italians of the mainland. The people applauded them and their corporal, and the infantry officer, as they went by.

The children ran before, crying out to the people who were still coming down from the village.

"Here comes the priest of the Saracinesca!" they shouted. "Here comes the assassin!"

"Assassin! assassin!" Ippolito heard the word a thousand times in five minutes. And some of the people spoke to the soldiers and the corporal.

"Give him to us, Uncle Carabineer!" cried the crooked carpenter. "What has the law to do with him? Give him to us! We will serve him half roasted and half boiled!"

All the people who heard laughed at this and jeered at Ippolito.

"See the blood on his hands!" screamed the carpenter's big wife, suddenly catching sight of the red stains. "See the blood of Sicily on the priest's hands!"

A yell rose from all the multitude, for a hundred had heard the woman's high, shrill voice, and the rest took up the cry, so that the children who went before ran back to see what was the matter. One was the woman's child. She caught him in her strong arms and raised him up to see, as she marched along.

"See the good Sicilian blood!" she cried into the boy's ear.

"Curses upon the souls of his dead!" yelled the child, half mad with excitement.

All the people surged along together, running and jostling one another to keep the priest in sight. And the children whistled and made cat-calls and strange noises, and the women screamed, and the men cursed him in their hard voices.

Bareheaded he walked between the soldiers, looking far ahead and not seeing or not wishing to see the people, nor to understand what they said. He had but one thought—not to break the faith of his priestly order by betraying the confession. Had he known that death was before him, he would not have yielded.

Suddenly something struck him on the shoulder, and he started, and his face changed. Someone had thrown a rotten orange at him, well aimed, and as it smashed upon his shoulder, some of the yellow juice spurted upon his cheek. For one moment the calm look was gone, and the clear features set themselves sternly, and the eyes flashed with human anger at the indignity of the insult. The crowd screamed with delight, and pushed the soldiers upon each other.

"Halt!" cried the carabineer corporal.

In a moment his great army revolver was in his hand, and all his men, watching him, had theirs ready.

"We are acting in the name of the law," he said, in a loud voice. "If anything more is thrown at us, we shall disperse you, and you must take the consequences."

"The orange was not thrown at you," cried the carpenter's wife.

"I have warned you," said the corporal. "Stand off, there! Fall back! Make way!" And he kept his revolver in his hand, as the people slunk away to right and left, cowed by the sight of the weapon.

After that there was less noise for a while, though he did not pretend to control that, nor to hinder them from saying what they pleased. And presently they began again, and the hissing words filled the air, and pierced the young priest's ears.

But he said nothing, and his face was cold and pale again, as he walked on, fearless and innocent, keeping the real murderer's secret for the sake of his own churchman's vow, and holding his head high amidst the insults and the jeers of the multitude.

It was a long way, for they had to march through the whole town to reach the quarters of the carabineers in the old convent on the other side. Ippolito would have marched a whole day's journey without wincing, if it had fallen to his lot, but he was glad when the wooden gates of the yard were loudly shut behind him, and he was at last free

from his enemies. He looked round, and Tebaldo was gone, and Concetta, and the sacristan, as well as all the rest, except the carabinieri. The officer of the line had gone home to write a despatch to his colonel, and Ippolito was alone with the carabinieri.

Meanwhile the little lame boy whom Ippolito employed, and who had a sort of half-grateful, half-expectant attachment for the kind priest, had done a brave thing, considering his infirmity. Seeing what was happening at the church and hearing what all the people said, he quietly slipped away and limped down to Camaldoli to warn Orsino Saracinesca. It took him a long time to get there, for he was very lame, having one leg quite crooked from the knee, besides some natural deformity of the hip. But he got to the gate at last, and it chanced that Orsino had just come in from riding and was standing there, his rifle slung behind him, when the little boy came down.

At first Orsino could not understand, and when he partly understood, he could not at first believe, the story. The boy's account, however, was circumstantial, and could not possibly have been invented. Then, when he felt sure that his brother was accused of Francesco's murder, Orsino's face darkened, and he called for his horse again and mounted quickly. The little lame boy looked up to him wistfully, beginning to limp along, and

Orsino bent over in his saddle and picked him up with one hand by his clothes, and set him before him, though he was a dirty little fellow. Then he galloped off up the hill. But the boy begged to be let down to the ground at the cemetery, for he said that his mother would kill him if she knew that he had warned Orsino.

The crowd was still lingering in the streets as the big man on his big horse came thundering along the paved way, his rifle at his back and the holsters on his saddle, his face stern and set. It was as well that he did not meet Tebaldo Pagliuca just then. It was one thing to throw an orange at an unarmed priest, and to scream out curses at him; it was quite another to stand in the way of Orsino Saracinesca, with nearly thirty shots to dispose of, mounted on his strong horse, and in a bad temper. The people shrank aside in silence, and looked after the hated Roman as he galloped by towards the carabinieri's quarters.

He struck the gate with his heavy boot by way of knocking, without dismounting. A man on duty inside asked who he was, for there were orders to keep the gate shut on account of the crowd.

"Saracinesca!" answered Orsino.

The gate swung back, and he rode in and asked for the corporal, dismounted, threw the bridle to the soldier, and went into the house. The corporal met him in the corridor.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Orsino. "Is it true that you have arrested my brother?"

"I was obliged to do so," answered the corporal, quietly enough. "I consulted the lieutenant and he also advised it. I am sorry, but it was evidently my duty."

"Release him at once," said Orsino, in a tone of authority.

The corporal shook his head.

"I cannot do that," he answered. "You are at liberty to see him, but he is a prisoner."

"You are the best judge of your own conduct. You know what you are doing. I shall telegraph to the Ministry in Rome at once."

"The Minister will not order Don Ippolito's release," answered the corporal, with conviction.

Orsino stared at him, and laughed rather roughly.

"You are mad," he replied. "You will lose your stripes for this, if nothing worse happens to you. I advise you to let my brother out at once."

"Signor Don Orsino," said the corporal, gravely, "I am an old soldier. I am especially instructed to protect you and your interests here. Yet, in the execution of my duty, I have been absolutely obliged to arrest your brother, the Reverend Don Ippolito, for killing Don Francesco Pagliuca, in the church of Santa Vittoria, this afternoon. The evidence was such that I should have risked degradation and punishment, if I had refused to arrest

him. It is not for me to judge of his possible guilt, which to me, personally, seems impossible. I could only act as a non-commissioned officer of carabinieri is obliged to act by the terms of our general orders. I say this to you personally, but I am answerable for the act to my superiors, and they do not often overlook mistakes. If you will come with me into my private room, I will tell you all the details of the case, and show you the knife and the blood-stained handkerchief which we found in Don Ippolito's pocket. I and my men will do all in our power to serve you, as we are instructed to do; but to release Don Ippolito without further proceedings is absolutely out of the question."

Orsino's expression changed while the man was speaking, for he judged him to be what he was, an honourable soldier with a vast amount of common sense. He followed him into the little room which had been the parlour of the convent, and sat down beside the plain deal table on which lay several day-books and a heap of large ruled paper with printed headings over the columns, half filled with neat writing. A little lamp with a green shade was already burning.

Orsino sat down and listened patiently to all the corporal had to say. When the latter had finished, he had said more than enough to prove to any sane person that he had done his duty.

There was the fact of the quarrel on the previous day. It mattered little that Orsino knew the true cause of the scuffle in the road, and that the corporal had not known it till Orsino told him. The fact of violence remained. There was the singularly continuous chain of circumstantial evidence got in the church. And there was Ippolito's obstinate silence.

"I see," said Orsino, gravely. "I beg your pardon. You have done right. That Francesco Pagliuca was killed by his brother Tebaldo, I am convinced."

"By his own brother?" exclaimed the carabineer, incredulously.

"That is what I believe; but I have no evidence. I should like to see Don Ippolito, if you please."

"I am glad that you understand me," said the corporal, who was used to being misjudged.

He led the way to a door in the corridor, and opened it. It was not locked, and he simply closed it by the latch, after admitting Orsino.

The room was a large one, overlooking the ample courtyard, but the two windows were heavily barred, as indeed were all those on the lower floor of the old convent. On one side, against the wall, stood a low trestle bed, covered with one of the soldiers' brown blankets. There was a deal table that had been painted green, an iron washstand,

and half a dozen rush-bottomed chairs. On the table stood a small lamp, with a shade precisely like the corporal's own, and beside it there was a big jug of wine and a heavy glass tumbler into which nothing had as yet been poured. The corporal had brought the wine himself, supposing that Ippolito would need it. It was the soldier's idea of comfort and refreshment.

Ippolito sat by the other side of the table, and started to his feet as Orsino entered. He smiled rather sadly, for he knew that he was in a very terrible and dangerous situation. So far as he could see, he might be sent to penal servitude for Tebaldo's crime, for nothing could have induced him to break his vow and betray the secret.

Orsino grasped his outstretched hand.

"I knew you would come," said Ippolito, with a glad intonation. "Who called you? They all hate us here. You should have heard how they cursed me and all of us, in the street. Somebody threw a rotten orange at me, and hit my shoulder, but the carabinieri kept them in order after that."

Orsino said something under his breath, and looked steadily into his brother's eyes. At last he spoke, and asked one question, quietly, coaxingly, as though only half hoping for an answer:

"Did Tebaldo kill him, or did he not?"

Ippolito's eyelids quivered at the suddenness of the question. His soul abhorred a lie, and

most of all one to proclaim the innocence of such a man. To answer the truth was to betray the confession and to break his solemn vow before God, as a priest. Silence, perhaps, was equivalent to casting suspicion on the murderer.

But he kept silent, for he could do nothing else.

CHAPTER XXIX

IPPOLITO was silent, and he turned away from his brother, half fearing lest even his eyes should assent to the accusation against Tebaldo. He went towards the window, through which the afterglow of the sunset was still faintly visible, and then, as though changing his mind, he came back to the table and sat down, keeping his face from the lamp as much as possible. Orsino took another chair.

"It is not right to accuse anyone of such a crime without evidence," said Ippolito, slowly.

Orsino did not answer at once. He took two cigars from his pocket and silently offered one to his brother, and both began to smoke, without speaking. They were so much in sympathy, as a rule, that there would have been nothing surprising in their silence on any ordinary occasion. But the elder man now felt that there was a mystery of which Ippolito was making a secret; he knew his brother's extraordinary but perfectly quiet tenacity when he chose not to speak of anything, and he turned the whole situation over in his mind. He was in possession of all the details known to the carabinieri, and of another piece of information

which had not reached them, but which he was keeping to himself until it might be of use.

For one of his men had seen from a long way off how a man riding bareback had chased a man on a saddled horse up the long straight hill to the cemetery, and he had told Orsino of the fact before the lame boy had arrived, though he admitted that he had not been able to recognize the riders. Orsino himself had found Taddeo's horse lying dead in the road just beyond the gate of the graveyard, and his own horse had shied at it. He recognized the dead beast, which was well known as one of the best horses in the country, and he had seen in a flash that it was not injured, and had not been shot, whereat he had concluded that it had probably been ridden to death in the race his man had described. Ippolito had told him, after the scuffle on the previous evening, that Concetta had directed the peasants to take Francesco to Taddeo's house. Distrusting Tebaldo altogether, as Orsino did, it was not extraordinary that he should hit on something very near the truth, by a single guess founded on what he knew. He was in total ignorance of Aliandra's connexion with the story, and he had no idea why the one brother should have been chasing the other. But he had often heard of Tebaldo's fits of ungovernable fury. Vittoria herself had told Orsino that, at such times, Tebaldo was more dangerous than a wild

beast, and she had also told him that her brothers often quarrelled.

Orsino guessed that such a quarrel had taken place to-day, somewhere on the road, and that it had ended in Francesco's killing his horse, reaching the church on foot, and being overtaken by his brother and stabbed a few seconds later, as had really happened.

Orsino was not very clever in the ordinary sense of the word, but his mind was direct and logical, when he exerted it. He went a step farther in his guessing, and concluded that Ippolito had not seen the murder, nor perhaps Tebaldo himself, but that Tebaldo had seen him. The priest had come down from the organ loft, had found the body lying on the steps, and had moved it, while Tebaldo had conceived the idea of accusing him of the deed. He explained Ippolito's silence by attributing to him, as a very conscientious man, the most extreme fear of bringing an accusation for which he had no ocular evidence. Though the train of thought is not easily expressed in words, it was a sufficiently reasonable one.

When he had followed it out, he knocked the ashes from his cigar, and looked at his brother.

"I am going to tell you what I think," he said, "for you are making a mystery of the truth out of some scruple of conscience."

Ippolito shaded his eyes with his hand, resting

his elbow on the table. He felt his brow moisten suddenly with anxiety, lest Orsino should somehow have guessed the secret, and his fears increased as his brother told him of the race, of the dead horse, and of the conclusions he had drawn.

In his painful position the young priest might have been forgiven for wishing that, altogether without his agency, Orsino might find out the truth. But he did not. As Orsino had once said of him, he had in him the stuff that sent martyrs to the stake in old days. He honestly hoped, with all his heart, that Orsino might not hit on the true story, and he was relieved when he heard the end of his brother's deductions. As a man, he was most anxious for his own immediate release, and he was willing that the murderer should be brought to justice. But as a priest, he felt horror at the thought that he, who had received the confession, might in any way whatever help to bring about such a result.

At that moment he wished that Orsino would go away, since he had not, at the first attempt, fathomed the secret. He might succeed the second time.

"I partly understand why you are silent," said Orsino. "It is not good to accuse a man who may be innocent. Neither you nor I should care to do that. But I am not the Attorney General. You can surely speak freely to me. You know that

anything you say is safe with me, and it is not as though you should be suggesting to me a suspicion which I had not already formed by myself. Do you not trust me? It is hardly even a case of trust! What could I say? That you, the accused, have the same impression which I have. But I will not even say that. The point is this: You were on the spot, in the church. Your guess at the truth must be incomparably more valuable than mine. That is what I am trying to make you understand."

He gently patted the table with his hand, emphasizing the last words, while he leaned forward to see his brother's face. But the latter turned away and smoked towards the window.

"Is that all true, or not?" Orsino asked, in a tone of insistence.

"What?" asked Ippolito, fearing to commit himself.

"That you can trust me not to put you in the position of accusing an innocent man."

"Yes; of course it is true."

Orsino looked at him thoughtfully for a few seconds.

"When you asked me what was true, just now, before you answered me, you asked the question because you were afraid that your answer might include my guess as to what happened. I suppose my guess was not altogether right, since you

were afraid of assenting to it. I wish you would look at me, Ippolito! What is all this? Is there to be no more confidence between us, because a mere look might mean that you suspect Tebaldo Pagliuca?"

Ippolito faced him, and smiled affectionately.

"If you, or our father, or any man like us, were in my position, you would act exactly as I am acting," he said slowly.

"You are perfectly innocent, and yet you act like a man who is afraid of incriminating himself!" said Orsino, growing impatient at last.

"I am perfectly innocent, at all events," answered Ippolito, with something like a laugh.

"I am glad that you are so light-hearted about it all. I am not. If we cannot catch the man who really killed Francesco before to-morrow morning, you will be taken down to Messina and imprisoned until we can bail you out, if bail is accepted at all, which I doubt. You run a good chance of being tried for murder. Do you realize that?"

"I cannot help it, if it comes to that," said Ippolito, quietly puffing at his cigar.

"You can at all events say something to help me in proving your innocence—"

"I am sorry to say that I cannot."

Orsino made an impatient movement, uncrossing and recrossing one knee over the other.

"You could if you chose," he said. "But there

is no more terrible obstacle to common sense than a morbidly scrupulous conscience. What do you suppose our people will think, in Rome?"

"They will not think me guilty, at all events," answered the priest. His manner changed. "I tell you frankly, Orsino," he said, his face growing square, as it sometimes did, "if I knew that I was to be sent to penal servitude for this, I would not say one word more than I have said already. It is quite useless to question me. Do your best to save me,—I know you will,—but do not count on me for one word more. Consider me to be a lay figure, deaf and dumb, if you please, mad, if you choose, an idiot, if it serves to save me, but do not expect me to say anything. I will not."

Orsino knew his brother well, and knew the manner and the tone. There was unchangeable resolution in every distinct syllable and in every quiet intonation. His own irritation disappeared, for he realized that Ippolito must have some great and honourable reason for keeping silence.

"So long as you are here, unless we find the murderer to-night, you will be shut up in this room," said Orsino, after a pause. "No preliminary examination can take place here, where there is not even an office of the Prefecture. They would naturally take you to Randazzo, but Messina would be better. We should have more chance of

getting you out on bail at once if we went to headquarters."

"Randazzo is a cooler place," observed Ippolito, thoughtfully.

"What in the world has that to do with it?" asked Orsino, in surprise.

"Only that if I am to be kept in prison all summer, I should prefer a cool climate."

"Really —" Orsino almost laughed at his calmness. "That is absurd," he said. "We shall certainly have the power to get you out provisionally."

"I hope so. Let them take me to Messina, if you think it best."

"I will make the corporal telegraph for authority at once. It would be well if we could get off before morning and avoid the rabble in the street. Have you had supper?"

"No. They brought me some wine. There it is — but I do not want anything. Shall you telegraph to our people? It would be better. They might see it in the papers."

"Of course. I shall send them a full account, and shall send the same telegram to the Minister of Justice. I know him very well, and so does our father."

"Send me up some clothes and my dressing things by a trooper, will you?" said Ippolito.

They made a few more arrangements, but Orsino abstained from asking any more questions, and

presently he left his brother alone, and after speaking with the corporal he mounted his horse and rode slowly out of the court into the street, towards the telegraph office. Half an hour later he was on his way down to Camaldoli. The people of the village had mostly gone into their houses, and the streets were almost deserted, for the short twilight was over, and it was already night.

He tried to see ahead of him in the gloom as he came near the cemetery, for he expected to find the grocer's horse still lying in the road. But it had been taken away already.

He had hesitated, at first, as to whether he should seek out Tebaldo and try to force the truth from him by sheer violence, but he had given up the idea at once as being absurd. If he failed, as he might fail,—for Tebaldo was desperately brave,—he should simply be creating fresh evidence of the hatred which existed between the two families, not to mention the fact that any such encounter might easily end in more bloodshed. Even to his unimaginative mind there seemed to be a strange fatality in the whole story. He had killed one brother in self-defence, or in what the law considered to be that, and now Ippolito was accused of murdering another of the brothers. It was wiser to leave the third alone, and to trust to the law to prove Ippolito's innocence. Orsino was not a man who instinctively loved violence and fighting, as

some men do. He felt that if San Giacinto had been present he would somehow have managed to set Ippolito free and get Tebaldo imprisoned in his place, by sheer strength and the power of terror which he exerted over so many people, but which, to do him justice, he did not abuse. The giant was an extraordinary man, mentally and physically, and always put action before logic, and logic before sentiment. Orsino, on the contrary, generally wished to think out every matter to the end before acting, though he was neither slow nor timid when he had ultimately made up his mind.

So far as he could do so, he had decided and acted; and his thoughts reverted to the situation itself, and most directly, now, to his love for Vittoria. He had been looking forward to seeing her before long, for he had begun to understand that his presence in Camaldoli was not often necessary for many days at a time; and of late, during his lonely rides, he had given himself up to planning some means for meeting her during his next visit to Rome.

She was the principal and central being in his whole daily life. The separation was not one of distance only, for there were other and almost insuperable obstacles to his marriage. After Ferdinando's death, after Maria Carolina d'Oriani's terrible imprecations, after his own father's absolute refusal to listen to the proposal, it seemed

almost impossible that he should ever really marry Vittoria. And now, as though to crush the last possibility out of existence, this new and terrible disaster had fallen like a thunderbolt from a clear sky.

Orsino was not very easily roused, but persistent opposition had the effect of slowly increasing the tension of his nature. Events had this effect upon him in a cumulative way. And his moral force slowly rose, as water in a huge embanked reservoir, into which, being empty, the little stream trickles idly, as though it had no force at all; but ever quietly flowing in from the source, it covers the bottom little by little, and still flows in, day by day, week by week; and the water rises slowly and very surely, gathering its terrible, incompressible weight into itself from the streamlet, till the body of it is deep and broad, and its weight is millions of tons, calm and still and ever rising; and then, one day, the freshet comes hissing down the bed of the stream, and the last rise in the reservoir is sudden and awful. The huge embankment quivers and rocks, and bursts at last; and the pent-up strength of the water is let loose in one moment, and sweeps howling and roaring down the valley, carrying death in its bosom and leaving utter desolation behind.

As he rode down through the silent night, the man wondered when he thought of the emptiness

in which his life had once moved, of how little he had cared for anything, of the imperturbable indifference with which he had thought of all the world. For he was beginning to feel his strength in him, matched against the resistance of events.

A girl had wrought the change; and even in his great perplexity and trouble, his face softened in the dark as he thought of her. Yet he knew, as grown men do, that only half the secret was in her, and that the other half was in himself. For the strength of love is that it is the source of all existing life, and is a law which men and women obey, as atoms are subject to gravitation. That is the strength of it. But the beauty of love, and the happiness, and the nobility, are of a higher and finer essence, not suddenly to be seen, grasped, and taken, but distilled in life's alembic of that which was before life, and shall be afterwards, for ever.

Orsino was not imaginative, and his nature was not of that kind which is commonly called spiritual, which is given to contemplation, and delights in the beautiful traceries of the soul's guesswork. He vaguely understood that there was more between his father and mother and in their happiness than he would have called love, though there was nothing for which he might not hope. At present his love was that great natural law, from which, if one comes within the sphere of its attraction, there is no more escape than there is from hunger and

thirst. He dignified it in his own person, by his inheritance of high manliness and honour. It did not dignify him. Vittoria lent it, by her being, the purity and loveliness of something half divine while wholly human, but it gave her nothing in return. Love can be coarse, brutal, violent, and yet still be love. According to the being it moves, we say that it is ennobled or debased.

Orsino saw the monster of impossibility rising between him and Vittoria, and though he said nothing to himself and formed no resolutions, he felt something within him rising to meet the impossible, and put it down. And beyond the obstacles he saw Vittoria's face clearly, with the light on it, watching him, and her eyes expecting him, and her lips moving to form words that should bid him come.

He rode slowly on through the blackness, for the road descended rapidly, and it was not safe to urge his horse. A deep, resentful melancholy settled upon him in the damp night air. There was nothing hopeless in it, for it was really the sensation of a new strength; and as the Greeks knew long ago, all great strength is grave and melancholic as Melancholia herself.

He thought of his brother sitting alone in the room where he was confined. He thought of Francesco's body lying in the little church, waiting to be buried, as Ferdinando's had lain, barely a

month ago. He thought of the widowed mother, twice bereaved, half crazed with suffering already, destined to waken on the morrow to meet another death wound. He thought of Vittoria, alone with that mother, cut off from himself as he was cut off from her, mourning with horror, if not with grief, for the brother who had been nothing to her while he lived. Then he was glad that he had not sought out Tebaldo and tried to force the truth from him. Things were bad enough, without more violence to make them worse.

But most of all he wondered at Ippolito's silence, and afterwards when he had tasted his lonely supper he sat long in his place, staring at the empty chair opposite, and trying to force his intelligence to penetrate the mystery by sheer determination.

CHAPTER XXX

TEBALDO felt safe that night when he set his thirsty lips to a big jug of thin wine and water and drained the whole contents at a draught, while the fat sacristan stood waiting at the door of the room in the grocer's house. He had been giving the man directions about the disposal of the funeral. It was the room Francesco had occupied, and his things lay about in disorder, as he had left them early in the morning when he had ridden down to Randazzo for the last time.

The man who had killed him had been under a terrible physical and mental strain, ever since he had left Rome, in the insanity of his jealousy. Now that all was over, he fancied that he should be able to think connectedly and reason about the future. He sent the man away with the empty jug and sat down, feeling in his pocket for a cigar. He had none, and he rose again, and began to look among his brother's belongings for something to smoke.

A strange sensation came over him, all at once. It seemed as though Francesco could not be dead, after all. His things seemed to have his life in

them. The leathern valise lay open on the floor, one side filled with fresh linen that had been disturbed in pulling something out, a heap of half-unfolded clothes in the other side, keeping up the flap that divided the two. A pair of black silk braces had fallen out upon the floor; a coat lay upon the chair close by; there was a clean handkerchief on the table, a smart note-book with a silver clasp, a small bottle of Eau de Lubin, a new novel in a paper cover, a crumpled newspaper two days old, and a pink pasteboard box of Egyptian cigarettes, open and less than half empty. Tebaldo took one and lighted it mechanically at the flame of the candle, wondering how it could be that Francesco would never want his cigarettes again. Surely he would come in, presently, and take one, and then would begin the old bickering and quarrelling that had gone on for years.

Now that it was all over, Tebaldo's first feeling among all these objects was that he missed his brother, whom he had always so utterly despised and whom he had bitterly hated with all his heart. He had not the sort of real timidity under a superficial recklessness which begins to feel the terror of remorse almost as soon as the irrevocable deed is done. But, little by little, as he turned over the things and puffed at the cigarette, a kind of stealing horror surrounded him, and would not leave him.

It had nothing to do with any suspicion of the supernatural, and he intended to lie down and try to sleep in the bed in which Francesco had slept on the previous night. It had nothing to do with fear of discovery, for he felt safe and was outwardly brave to recklessness. It was rather the horror of having done, almost unwittingly, what no power could undo, and of having utterly destroyed, at a blow, something to which he had been accustomed all his life. And this strangely piercing regret clashed continually with the expectation, arising out of long habit, of suddenly seeing Francesco appear in person where all his belongings were lying about, in the room he had last inhabited. He was reckless, unscrupulous, choleric, almost utterly bad, but he was human, as all but madmen are. He felt safe, but just then he would have risked any danger for the sake of seeing Francesco open the door and walk in.

He threw away his cigarette and sat down to think. His eyes fixed themselves, as his chin rested on his hand and his elbow on the table, and a long time passed before he moved. But when he got up, he had taken hold of himself again and was ready to begin his life once more. His weaknesses did not last long. Francesco was dead. If it had been to do over again, he would not have done it. He could not have done it at all, in cold blood, — perhaps no man could, — and there had

been much to rouse him. But since it was done, Francesco could never again make love to Aliandra, and there was the evil satisfaction of having successfully thrown the guilt upon a Saracinesca, of all people, and so cleverly that the accused man would, in all probability, be condemned.

He had made up his mind at the instant as to what he should say, and he had said it all to the corporal of carabinieri. He and his brother had met in Randazzo at Basili's house, and intending to come up to Santa Vittoria, had laid a wager, the one who first entered the little church to be the winner, and Tebaldo had agreed to ride bareback and allow his brother a start of five minutes. Francesco had killed his horse and had run for the church on foot, and Tebaldo had entered two or three minutes late. Doubtless, he had said, Francesco, in his haste to win the bet, had run against Ippolito, and in a moment the quarrel of the previous day had been renewed more violently. Francesco was unarmed, and the priest had stabbed him instantly, just as Tebaldo came in. The wager had been a reckless and foolish one, no doubt, but there was nothing impossible in the story, which perfectly accounted for the wild riding, in case, as had really happened, anyone had seen the two men on the road. No one but Aliandra Basili knew how they had left her father's house, and she, for her own sake, and certainly

for Francesco's, would not tell what she knew. She was sure to say that Tebaldo had borrowed the horse, and she would not let her father know that the brothers were quarrelling about her. Nevertheless, she knew that much, and would guess the rest, and being a woman, there was a possibility that she might volunteer her evidence when she should hear that the innocent priest was upon his trial.

It was necessary to see Aliandra at once. The crude cynicism which was at the root of the man's strange character came to the surface again, as he followed out his train of thought and discovered, at the end of it, where the weak point of his safety lay.

He slept little that night, though he was weary from the mad ride and shaken by the strain under which he had lately lived. Again and again he dreamed that he was doing the deed, and awoke each time with a start in the dark. And the familiar perfume of Francesco's dressing things disturbed him, even through the stale smoke of the cigarette he had smoked. Yet one of his chief characteristics was that he was always ready and not easily surprised. Waking, he realized each time where he was, who he was, what he had done, and the fact that he must be up early in the morning, and each time he laid his head upon the pillow again with the determination to sleep and get the rest he needed.

Apart from the elements of fear and honour, and in so far as the mere act of killing is concerned, there is but a difference of degree between the homicide who has stabbed a man in anger, and the soldier who has killed one enemy, or ten, in battle. In most cases the homicide is pursued by a fear of consequences to which the soldier is not subject. Tebaldo felt himself safe.

He had lost no time in so fully indemnifying Taddeo, the grocer, for the death of his horse, that the excellent 'maffeuso' had no difficulty in providing him with another in the morning. He rode up to the carabineers' quarters and gave notice of his movements before going down to Randazzo, for he did not wish to appear to leave Santa Vittoria without informing the authorities. He was told that Ippolito had been taken to Messina before dawn, and that Orsino had accompanied him. He had decided that his brother should be buried on the following day, and meanwhile the coffin lay in the little church surrounded by many burning candles, and preparations were being made for a solemn requiem. Many of the people went in, on their way to their work, and knelt a moment to say a prayer for the soul of Francesco Pagliuca, and a short but heartfelt one for the destruction of all the Saracinesca in this world and the next. This seemed to them but simple justice, though the more devout of them

were aware that it was sinful to wish death to anyone.

Tebaldo dismounted at the door of the church, and bade a loiterer hold his horse while he went in. He knew that the whole population would think it strange and unnatural if he should pass by, on his business, without stopping, after giving such elaborate orders for the funeral.

For his own part, he would gladly have escaped the ugly necessity, not because the hypocrisy of it was in the least repugnant to him, but because he had the natural animal dislike of revisiting a place where something terrible had happened. It was so strong that he grew pale as he went in under the door and walked up the aisle to the catafalque.

But the whole place seemed changed. He had no realization of the fact that his brother's body lay in the angular thing under the black pall. There was a strong smell of incense and many lights were burning. He felt that he was observed, and his nerves were singularly good. He knelt some time with bent head at the foot of the coffin, then crossed himself, rose, and went out. The people about the door made way for him respectfully. There were two or three of the very poor among them. No one begs in that part of Sicily, but Tebaldo gave them the copper coins he had loose in his pocket, and passed on.

"God will render it to you," said the poor

people, kissing the backs of their own fingers toward him as a way of kissing his hand by proxy. "God bless you! The Madonna accompany you!"

As he mounted, one old woman touched his knee and then kissed the hand with which she had touched it. He nodded gravely and rode away, glad to turn his back on the church at last and get out upon the high road.

The news of Francesco's death had already reached Randazzo by a wine-carrier who had come down with a load in the night. Tebaldo expected that this would be the case, and he considered that his interview with Aliandra would be facilitated thereby. He went to the inn and put up his horse. The people treated him with a grave and sympathizing respect. He had arrived there on the previous day with a few belongings, but in the suddenness of events the landlord did not consider it strange that he should not have returned during the night. Tebaldo did not volunteer any explanations, but went to his room, refreshed himself, changed his clothes, and then told the landlord that he was going to see Basili, the notary. This, also, seemed quite natural, in such a case, as Basili had always been the Corleone's man of business.

Gesualda opened the door, and he at once saw, by the gravity in her ugly face as she greeted him, that she knew what had happened. She ushered him into the front room downstairs and went up

to call Aliandra, for Tebaldo said that he wished to see her before visiting her father. He stood waiting for the young girl, and going to the window he saw that the fastenings of the blinds were broken, and he remembered that he must have broken them when he forced them to look out after Francesco. The fact brought the whole scene vividly to his memory again, with all its details, and he remembered, by the connexion of little events, much that he had forgotten. Notably he recalled distinctly the very few words he had spoken to Aliandra during a meeting which had scarcely lasted two minutes, but which, by the operation of his anger, had hitherto seemed almost a blank in his recollection.

Aliandra entered the room and spoke to him first. To his own surprise, he started nervously at the sound of her voice, as though she were in some way connected with Francesco, and should have been dead with him, or he alive with her. For since his brother's sudden departure from Rome, the two had been constantly linked in his mind by his desperate jealousy.

Aliandra wore a loose black silk morning gown, and she was pale. She did not come up to Tebaldo, after she had closed the door, but seemed to hesitate and laid her hand upon the back of a chair, looking at him earnestly. His face was grave, for he knew his risk.

"I have just heard," she said in a low voice.

"Yes," he said after a short pause. "I thought that you must know. I wished to see you at once, so I came, though he is not buried yet."

"I am glad," she answered, "for I do not understand. It all seems so strange and terrible."

"It is. Sit down beside me, and I will try to tell you. It will not be so hard as it was to tell the authorities up in Santa Vittoria yesterday. I love you, Aliandra. That is why I came to you."

It was true that he loved her, but that was not the reason of his coming. Yet he spoke simply and sincerely, and she said nothing, but sat down at a little distance from him and folded her hands, waiting for him to tell his story.

"I love you," he repeated slowly and thoughtfully. "When he left Rome, I knew that he must have come to you, and as soon as I could get away, I followed him, sure that I should find him here, for I was jealous of him, jealous to madness. People laugh at jealousy. They do not know what it is." He paused.

"No," she answered gravely, for she remembered how he had looked when he had entered the house on the previous afternoon. "No. People do not understand what it is. Go on, please."

"It is a hell in soul and body. When I came here yesterday, I meant to come in at once. As I passed under the window I heard your voices dis-

tinctly. There was no one in the street, and I leaned against the wall and heard what you said. I touched the blinds once or twice, moving them a little, so as to hear better. Then I heard him tell you that falsehood about my engagement to Miss Slayback, and I put my hand on the sill, to draw myself up and deny it. But I struck my head under the blinds that were pushed out. Then I heard him come to the window, and I asked him to come outside: You know how he fled, while I was here, and I took your father's mare, without saddle or bridle and chased him."

"Yes, you frightened me," said Aliandra, as he paused again. "I had to tell my father that you had borrowed the mare. She came back of her own accord and was standing outside the stable gate this morning, waiting to be let in, all covered with mud. Please go on quickly."

"It rained. There was a terrible thunderstorm. I overtook him two or three miles on, where the road winds, for he saw that it was senseless to run away, as though I wished to injure him."

"You looked as though you did," said Aliandra, thoughtfully. "I do not wonder that he fled."

"I do not say that if I had found him here, I might not have handled him roughly," said Tebaldo, wisely. "But the gallop cooled us both, I suppose. And you know that when he chose he had a gentle, good-natured way of speaking that

disarmed one. Yes — we quarrelled about you at first for a while, and then, being cooler, as I said, we rode quietly along together, though we did not say much. On the more level part of the road higher up, he began to talk of the horse he was riding, which belonged to Taddeo, the grocer, and was a good beast, but I said that your father's mare was the fleeter, and he denied it. At last he proposed that we should settle the question by racing up to the town. The one who got into the little church of Santa Vittoria outside the gate was to win. I gave him four minutes' start by my watch, because I was lighter and was riding bareback. Do you understand?"

He looked at her keenly and expectantly, for the story sounded very plausible to him. She nodded slowly, in answer, with a little contraction of the eyelids, as though she were weighing the possibilities.

"I had him in sight, and then I fell with the mare at a jump, for I had no bridle and could not lift her properly. But we were not hurt, and I got on again. I saw him again before me on the long, straight stretch up to the cemetery. Taddeo's horse must have had an aneurism, I should think, for just beyond the gate it rolled over stone dead. I saw Francesco jump off as the beast staggered, for he knew what was the matter. But he meant to win the bet and be in the church first. He ran up

the last bit like a deer, and disappeared over the shoulder of the hill. It all happened in a moment, and I had still a quarter of a mile to make. Seeing that he must win, I did not hurry the mare, but she took fright at the dead horse and bolted up the last bit. At the church I got off and hitched the halter to a stake that had been driven into the ground for a banner at the last festa. I did it carelessly, I suppose, for the mare got loose. I do not know. When I entered the church I saw my brother wrestling with Ippolito Saracinesca on the steps of the altar, and the priest had a big knife in his hand and struck him before I was half way up the church."

Tebaldo was now excessively pale, and there was a nervous tremor in his voice. Aliandra was almost as pale as he, but still her lids were a little drawn in, and she kept her eyes on him.

"You have heard the rest," said Tebaldo, and his mouth was so dry that he could hardly speak. "I locked the priest into the church, which has no other door, and I went for the carabinieri. They took him down to Messina early this morning, before the people were about in the streets, and he will be committed for trial without doubt. His hands were covered with blood, and he had the knife in his pocket. He had cleaned the blade carefully on his pocket handkerchief, like a fool, instead of throwing it away into a corner. As for

the reason of the murder, Francesco and he had come to blows on the day before yesterday in the road. The priest admitted the fact. Heaven only knows what they were quarrelling about, but it must have begun again in the church. At all events, that is what happened, and my poor brother is dead. God rest his soul."

"Amen," said Aliandra, mechanically.

Tebaldo wiped the moisture from his pale forehead, glad that he had told his story and told it so well. It was, indeed, a marvellously lucid narrative, in which he had taken full advantage of every available fragment of truth to strengthen and colour the general falsehood.

Aliandra, like any reasonable person, would have found it hard to believe that a man supposed to have the manners and civilization of a modern gentleman could do what Tebaldo had really done. But, on the other hand, it was even harder to see how the deed could have been done by one who was not only just as civilized, but a churchman besides.

She had been terribly shocked by the news of Francesco's death, which had reached her only a few minutes before Tebaldo had appeared. She remembered the latter's face, and the terror of the former on the previous afternoon, she remembered that the other brother had been a brigand, or little better, and she knew many stories of the Pagli-

uca's wild doings before they had gone to Rome. It would have surprised her far less if Gesualda, who had heard the story from the carter himself, had told her that one brother had killed the other, than it did to be told that the guilty man was a Roman, a priest, and a Saracinesca.

But Tebaldo's story was plausible, and she had to admit that it was as she thought it over. He had evidently been under a strong emotion while telling it, too, and the fact was in his favour, in her eyes, for she had been fond of Francesco.

"Have you told me the whole truth?" she asked suddenly, after a long silence.

"Of course I have told you the truth," he answered, with a half-startled, nervous intonation.

"You have not always done so," said she, leaning back in her chair. "But I do not see why you should conceal anything from me now."

"You will see it all in the account of the trial."

"It is terrible!" she exclaimed, realizing once more what it all meant. "Terrible, terrible," she repeated, passing her hand over her eyes. "Only yesterday he was here, sitting beside me, telling me —"

She stopped short.

"Yes, I heard what he told you," said Tebaldo, in an altered voice. "It is of no use to go over it."

"I was fond of him," she answered. "I was

very fond of him. I have often told you so. It is dreadful to think that we shall never see him again — never hear his voice — ”

Her eyes filled with tears, for beyond the first horror of his death there was the sadness. He had been so young, so full of life and vitality. She could hardly understand that he was gone. The tears welled over slowly and rolled down her smooth cheeks, unheeded for a few moments.

“I wish I knew the truth,” she said, rousing herself, and drying her eyes.

“But I have told you the truth,” answered Tebaldo, with a return of nervous impatience.

“Yes, I know. But there must be more. What was there between him and the priest? Why did they fight in the road? It all seems so improbable, so mysterious. I wish I knew.”

“You know all that I know, all that the law knows. I cannot invent an explanation.”

“It is a mystery to you, too, then? You do not understand?”

“I do not understand. No one knows all the truth but Ippolito Saracinesca. He will probably tell it in self-defence. If he could prove that my brother attacked him first, it would make a great difference. He will try to make out that he killed him in self-defence.”

“It is very mysterious,” repeated Aliandra.

They talked in the same way for some time.

Gradually her distrust of him disappeared, because he did not try to prove too much, and his own story, as he went over the points, seemed to her more and more lucid. He took advantage of little questions she put to him, from time to time, in order to show her how very complete the account was, and how utterly beyond his own comprehension he thought the fight at the cemetery on the day before the murder. He was amazingly quick at using whatever presented itself. Her doubts did not really leave her, and they would return again after he was gone, but they sank out of her reach as she listened to him.

Then she made him go upstairs with her and tell the whole story to her father. Tebaldo submitted, but the strain on him was becoming very great, and the perspiration stood in great drops on his brows, as he went over it all for Basili. He knew that the notary was a man not easily deceived, and was well aware that his opinion would be received with respect by the principal people in Randazzo. He was, therefore, more careful than ever to state each point clearly and accurately. He saw, moreover, that Aliandra was listening as attentively as before. Possibly, now that he was no longer speaking directly to her, her doubts were coming to the surface again. But Tebaldo's nerves were good, and he went to the end without a fault. The notary only asked three

or four simple and natural questions, and he did not seem surprised that Tebaldo should not know the cause of the disagreement between his brother and Ippolito.

Aliandra went downstairs with Tebaldo. She seemed to expect that he should go away, for she stood still in the hall at the foot of the stone staircase.

"When are you going back to Rome?" he asked, for he wished to see her again.

"As soon as my father can spare me," she answered.

"I shall have to go down to Messina to give my evidence," he said. "When the funeral is over, to-morrow morning, I shall come here, and go on to Messina the next day. May I see you to-morrow afternoon?"

To his surprise, she hesitated. She herself scarcely knew why she did not at once assent naturally.

"Yes," she said, after a pause. "I suppose so, if you wish to."

"I do wish to see you," he answered. "You have no reason to doubt that, at all events."

"You speak as though I had reason to doubt other things you have said." She watched him keenly, for the one incautious little speech had weakened the effect he had produced with such skill.

"You pretended to doubt," he answered boldly. "You asked me if I was telling you the truth about my brother. That was doubting, was it not? You always do. I think you do not even believe that I love you."

"I only half believe it. Are you going over the discussion we had in Rome, again?"

"No. It would be useless."

"I think so too," she said, and her eyes grew suddenly cold.

He sighed and turned from her, towards the door. It was the first perfectly natural expression of feeling that had escaped him, and it was little enough. But it touched her unexpectedly, and she felt a sort of pity for him which was hard to bear. That one audibly drawn breath of pain did more to persuade her that he really loved her than all the words he had ever spoken. She called him back when his hand was already on the door.

"Tebaldo — wait a moment!" Her voice was suddenly kind.

He turned in surprise, and a softer look came over his drawn and tired features.

"I shall be very glad to see you when you come," she said gently. "I do not know why I hesitated — I did not mean to. Come whenever you like."

She held out her hand, and he took it.

"You may think the worst you will of me,

Aliandra," he said. "But do not think that I do not love you."

"I believe you do," she answered in the same gentle tone, and she pressed his hand a little.

Just as he was about to open the door, her eyes fell upon the rifle Francesco had left standing in the corner.

"Take your brother's gun," she said. "I do not like to see it here. I am sad enough already."

He slipped the sling over his shoulder without speaking, for the odd sensation that Francesco was not dead, after all, came over him as on the previous evening, and with it the insane longing to see his brother alive. He felt that his face might betray him, and he went out hastily into the noon-day glare. The heat restored the balance of his nerves, as it generally did, and when he reached the inn he was calm and collected.

Aliandra went upstairs to her father's room, and sat down beside his couch, in silence. The sunlight filtered through the green blinds, and brought the warm scent of the carnations from without. The notary lay back, with half-closed eyes, apparently studying the queer outline of his splinted leg as it appeared through the thin, flowered chintz coverlet.

"For my part," he said, without moving, and as though concluding a train of thought which he had

been following for a long time, "I do not believe one word of the story, from beginning to end."

"You do not believe Don Tebaldo's story?" asked Aliandra, more startled than surprised.

"Not one word, not one half word, not one syllable," replied the notary, emphatically. "We can say it between ourselves, my daughter. If my sister were here, I should not say it, for she is not discreet. It is a beautiful story, well composed, logical, studied, everything you like that is perfect. It must have taken much thought to put it together so nicely, and it is not intelligence that Tebaldo Pagliuca lacks. But no one will make me believe that a quiet little Roman priest could have killed one of those Corleone in that way. It is too improbable. It is a thing to laugh at. But it is not a thing to believe."

"I do not know what to say," answered Aliandra, all her doubts springing up again.

"We are not called upon to say anything. The law will take its course, and if it condemns an innocent Italian—well, it has condemned many innocent Sicilians. The one will pay for the other, I suppose. But as for the facts, that is a different matter. I daresay the priest had a knife of his own in his pocket, but it was not the knife that killed Pagliuca. Now, I do not wish to imply that Don Tebaldo killed him—"

"That is impossible!" exclaimed Aliandra.

"He could not come here and talk about it so calmly. The mere idea makes me shiver. What I think is that someone else killed him, — a brigand, perhaps, for some old quarrel, and that Tebaldo has thrown the blame on the priest, just because he is a Saracinesca."

"Perhaps. Anything is possible, except that the priest killed him. But as we know nothing, it is better to say nothing. It might be thought that we favoured the Romans."

"It is strange," said Aliandra. "When he is speaking, I believe all he says, but now that he is gone, I feel as you do about it. He said he should come back to-morrow."

"It is of no use for you to see him again. Why does he come here? I do not wish to be involved in this affair. Make an excuse, if he comes, and do not see him."

"Yes," answered Aliandra. "I will manage not to see him. It is of no use, as you say."

Tebaldo rode back to Santa Vittoria to bury his brother. Almost the whole population followed the funeral from the church to the cemetery, and it was easy to see how the people looked at the matter. Tebaldo received a summons to appear and give his evidence in two days, and he left the village early in order to have time to spend in Randazzo with Aliandra before taking the afternoon train from Piedimonte to Messina.

One thing only he had left undone which he had intended to do, for it had been impossible to accomplish it without attracting attention. He had meant to get into the little church alone and recover the knife he had dropped through the grating that stood before the glass casket in which the bones of the saint were preserved. As the details of those short and terrible moments came back to him, he remembered that the thing had not dropped far. He had heard it strike the stone inside immediately, and though it was improbable that the grating should be opened for a long time, yet the weapon was there, waiting for someone to find it, and possibly for some to recognize it, for he had possessed it several years.

The first requiem mass for Francesco had been sung in the parish church, for the curate had said that Santa Vittoria must be reconsecrated by the bishop before mass could be celebrated there again, the crime committed being a desecration. Tebaldo thought it just possible that at the bishop's visit the grating might be opened in order to show him the casket. But this was by no means certain. On the whole, he believed himself safe, for there was no name on the sheath of the knife, and he did not remember that he had ever shown it to anyone who could identify it as belonging to him.

He had sent for a carriage and drove down to Randazzo, stopping at the inn, as usual. He

knocked at the door of the notary's house a few minutes later, expecting to be admitted by Gesualda. To his surprise, no one came to let him in. He knocked twice again with the same result, and was about to go away, when Basili's man, the same who had accompanied San Giacinto and Orsino to Camaldoli, opened the stable gate and came up to him.

"There is the notary," he said. "No one else is at home. The Signorina Aliandra has taken Gesualda and is gone out to visit friends in the country. They will not come back before tomorrow. The notary sleeps."

Tebaldo was very much surprised and disconcerted. He remembered how kindly and gently Aliandra had spoken when he had parted from her, and he could not understand. She had left no message, and it was clear enough that she had gone away in order to avoid him. He went back to the inn, a good deal disturbed, for if she wished to avoid him, it must be because she had some suspicion. That was the only conclusion which he could reach as he thought the matter over. It was by no means absolutely logical, being suggested by the state of his conscience rather than by the operation of his reason.

He was disturbed and nervous, and he realized with a vague trepidation that instead of forgetting what he had done, and becoming hardened to the

consciousness of it, he was suffering from it more and more as the hours and days went by. Little things came back to their lost places in his memory, which might have been noticed by other people, and might betray him. To himself, knowing the truth, the story he had invented looked far less probable than it appeared to those who had heard it from him.

He thought of writing to Aliandra, for he was bitterly disappointed at not seeing her; but when he considered what he could say in a letter, he saw that he could only tell her of his disappointment. What he unconsciously longed for, was the liberty to speak out plainly to someone, and tell the whole truth, with perfect safety to himself. But that desire was still vague and unformulated.

There was no possibility of waiting till the next day to see Aliandra when she returned. He was expected to appear on the following morning in Messina, to give his evidence, and he had no choice but to go at once. He left Randazzo with a heavy heart, and a feverish sensation in his head.

CHAPTER XXXI

IPPOLITO was committed for trial on the charge of having killed Francesco Pagliuca in the church of Santa Vittoria, and Tebaldo Pagliuca was the principal witness against him. That was the result of the preliminary examination in Messina.

No one believed that Ippolito had committed the crime, neither the judge nor the prefect of the province, nor the carabinieri who had arrested him and brought him down. Yet the evidence was such that it was impossible to acquit him, and his obstinate silence, after a simple denial of the charge, puzzled the authorities. It was the expressed opinion of the judge that, in any case, and supposing that the priest were guilty, it was not a murder, but a homicide committed in a struggle, which had been the result of a quarrel entirely unaccounted for. Taking Tebaldo's own story as true, it was clear that Francesco's appearance in the church had been too sudden and unexpected to allow of the smallest premeditation on Ippolito's part. Tebaldo said that he had come in and seen the two fighting. The judge observed that, if a struggle had taken place, it was more than prob-

able that Francesco, coming suddenly upon Ippolito, had sprung upon him to avenge himself for having been maltreated by the priest on the previous day. Here Orsino rose and told the story of that first quarrel, as he had heard it from his brother immediately after it had occurred. On being questioned, Ippolito admitted the perfect truth of the story, and the judge ordered that Concetta's evidence should be taken at Santa Vittoria by a deputy of the court.

Tebaldo had been in complete ignorance of the truth about Concetta, but he saw that it would be best to take the judge's view. For all he knew, he said, his brother might have attacked Ippolito on entering the church. Ippolito was at liberty to say so, if he chose, observed Tebaldo. The fact did not militate against his own story, in the least. On the contrary, it accounted for the struggle. Francesco was unarmed, however. Tebaldo was prepared to swear to that, and did. Ippolito did not know it, and, being attacked suddenly, might have drawn his knife and defended himself.

The worst of all this was that it lent a faint air of probability to the accusation, of which Tebaldo, with his usual quickness, took advantage at once. But the judge, in his heart, was no more inclined to believe Ippolito guilty than before, though he saw no way of acquitting him. The young priest stood calm and self-possessed between the cara-

bineers throughout the whole examination, and his quiet eyes made Tebaldo uncomfortable.

San Giacinto arrived from Rome before the hearing was finished, and entered the courtroom when Tebaldo was speaking. There was something so gloomily ominous about the grey old giant's eyes that even Tebaldo's voice changed a little as he spoke. San Giacinto had twice, in serious affairs, been the means of clearing matters up suddenly and completely, and as Orsino grasped his huge hand, he felt that all would be well.

The judge admitted Ippolito to bail, and San Giacinto offered himself and was accepted as surety, being a large landowner in Sicily and a person well known throughout the country. The trial would probably not take place before the autumn, but there is a great latitude allowed in Italy, in the matter of bail, except when the prisoner is charged with premeditated murder.

"I think," said San Giacinto to the judge, when the proceedings were officially closed, "that it would be worth your while to visit Santa Vittoria in person."

Tebaldo heard and listened, and he thought of the knife under the altar. If the judge should go to the church and insist upon examining everything thoroughly, it might be found.

"The second hearing will not come before me," observed the judge. "Nevertheless —" He hesi-

tated a moment and then spoke in a lower tone. "The case interests me very much," he said. "I should like to see the place where it happened. I might take that country girl's evidence myself, and visit the church at the same time. Yes, I think I shall accept the suggestion."

Though he had lowered his voice, Tebaldo had heard most of what he had said, and more than enough to increase the fear of discovery, which was rapidly growing up in the place of the cynical certainty of safety which he had at first felt. Nor had the examination gone so absolutely against Ippolito as he had hoped. The judge and the officials were evidently in sympathy with the accused man, and Tebaldo had been heard with a sort of cold reserve which suggested a doubt in his hearers. Like Aliandra and her father, they all felt the utter improbability of the story, as they compared the accused with the accuser, though they had been obliged to admit just so much as they had no means of denying.

The view taken by the law on the strength of the whole evidence can be summed up in a few words. Francesco Pagliuca had assaulted a young country girl on the high road. She had screamed for help. Ippolito Saracinesca had been near and had saved her and soundly beaten her assailant. On the very next occasion of meeting him by accident, Francesco had rushed at the priest to repay

his score of blows, and the priest, taken unawares, had defended himself with a knife he had about him, and which his brother had insisted that he should carry, for the very reason that he might, at any moment, be assaulted by Francesco. It was not justifiable homicide, assuredly, but there were a great many extenuating circumstances. That was as much as the men of the law could say for Ippolito, on the evidence; but not one of them believed that he had killed Francesco.

The three Saracinesca men left the court together and drove away in a closed carriage. They decided that Orsino and Ippolito should return to Rome at once and quiet the family by their appearance, while San Giacinto went up to Camaldoli, to keep matters in order as far as he could. Orsino offered to go back alone, if San Giacinto would accompany his brother, but the big man preferred to take matters into his own hands, as he usually did when there was a crisis of any sort.

When the two brothers were alone in their compartment in the train that left Reggio that evening, Orsino drew a long breath. The sunset glow was over the hills, and the rushing breeze that blew in through the open window was sweet and clean to the taste after the foul air of filthy Messina and the almost more poisonous atmosphere of the courtroom. Orsino looked out in silence for a few moments, too glad to speak to

Ippolito. When he looked round at last, he saw that his brother was leaning back in the opposite corner, with closed eyes, one hand thrust into the bosom of his cassock, the other lying upon the seat behind him. Orsino watched him, expecting that presently he would open his eyes and begin to talk. But Ippolito had fallen asleep almost instantly in his corner, exhausted by the long strain of days and nights spent in terrible anxiety.

No one ever knew what he had suffered during that time. Though of a fibre different from his father and his brothers, he was strong and healthy, but in those few days he had become thin and white, so that he looked positively delicate now, as he leaned back in his corner.

His anxiety had not been all for himself. It was a fearful thing, indeed, to be accused of murder, and be led like a murderer through a yelling rabble, to be lodged in a prison, to be thrust forward to the bar of a crowded courtroom to answer for a great crime. But it was worse to be accused by the real murderer and to be bound by one of the most solemn of all vows to keep that murderer's secret and bear his accusation without giving one hint of the truth.

It was no wonder that at the first relief from such a tension, he should fall asleep at last, and Orsino was glad when he saw and partly understood. He had slept little himself since the night

of Francesco's death, but he could not have rested now, for he still had much anxiety and many things to disturb his peace. He was in profound ignorance of what had happened to Vittoria and her mother, though he had been almost hourly in communication with his own family.

Corona's first impulse had been to leave Rome instantly and join her sons, and it had been with the greatest difficulty that Giovanni had persuaded her to await the result of the preliminary hearing. He himself was afraid to leave her, and he had perfect confidence in San Giacinto. He was in reality most preoccupied about his wife; for he, like everyone else, was struck from the first by the outrageous improbability of the accusation. He hardly ate nor slept, himself, it was true, but he was all along perfectly certain that Ippolito must be at liberty in a few days, and that the whole truth must be known before long.

Corona said little after she had consented to remain at home, but she suffered intensely. The beautiful high features were like a white marble mask, and when she spoke at all, her words were brief, nervous, almost hard. Her eyes were like black steel, and her figure grew slighter, and seemed to grow taller, too. Giovanni thought that the little, soft, grey streaks in her intensely black hair were suddenly growing broad and silvery. He was almost more anxious for her than for Ippolito.

But she never broke down in any way. She showed herself to the world, in her carriage, as if nothing had happened, though she received no one during those days. She knew how to bear suffering, for she had borne much in early life, and Giovanni needed not to fear for her. He hardly left her. They so belonged to each other that it was easier to bear trouble together. Possibly, though he did not know it, he looked to her in his anxiety quite as much as she looked to him. It would have been hard to say; for where there is such sympathy, such trust, and such love, there is also a sort of community of courage and of strength and of endurance for a joint suffering.

When the news of the decision in Messina came, however, Giovanni considered the trouble to be at an end. Corona only smiled faintly as they read the telegram together.

"At liberty on bail," she said slowly. "That is not an acquittal. He is still accused of the murder."

"Long before the trial we shall have discovered the truth," answered Giovanni, confidently.

"Until we do, he is still accused of the murder," repeated Corona, with slow insistence.

She had not believed it possible that he could be held for trial. But the gladness of a near meeting with him stole upon her anxiety.

As soon as the first greetings were over, he went

with her to her own sitting-room, and they remained alone together. For a long time she held his hands and looked into his eyes, while he spoke to her.

"Do not ask me any questions, mother dear," he said, smiling at her. "You know that I did not kill the poor man, and no one believes that I did. Do not let them torment me with all sorts of questions. If I could answer them, I should have answered them at once. I cannot."

Still she did not speak, for Orsino had written and telegraphed every detail, and had again and again spoken of Ippolito's inexplicable silence.

"Mother, trust me, and do not ask me questions," said the young priest, earnestly.

"Yes," she said at last. "I trust you, and I always have. I was not hesitating, my dear, and I shall never ask you anything about it, nor allow anyone else to do so, if I can prevent it. But it has dawned on me—the truth I wanted. I believe I understand."

A startled look came into Ippolito's eyes, and his hands closed suddenly upon hers. He opened his lips to speak, but could not find wise words, for he believed that she had guessed the truth, by some extraordinary and supernormal process of intuition.

"No," she said reassuringly, "do not be afraid. I shall not even tell you what I think, and I shall

certainly not tell anyone else. But—" She stopped suddenly.

"But what?" he asked, in the utmost anxiety, searching her eyes.

"Nothing that I need say, my dear boy," she answered quietly. "It is better to say nothing about such things when one is not sure. Sit down beside me, and let us be together as we used to be before all this happened."

He sat down, and they remained long together.

There was but one opinion in Rome. Everyone said that Tebaldo Pagliuca knew more about his brother's death than he chose to tell, and had managed to cast the burden of evidence against Ippolito. Hundreds of people called at the Palazzo Saracinesca, and Ippolito had scores of notes from friends, congratulating him on having regained his liberty.

Old Donna Francesca Campodonico came to see Corona, a saintly, shadowy woman, who lived alone in a beautiful old palace near the Tiber.

"A Corleone, my dear!" she said. "What do you expect? We are told to love our enemies, it is true, but we are at liberty to love them as enemies, and not as friends. In order to do that it is necessary to distinguish them, and the more clearly we draw the line, the better."

"It is refreshing to hear you speak of anyone as an enemy," answered Corona, with a smile.

"My dear," said Donna Francesca, "I am very human, I assure you. Never have anything to do with a Corleone or a Braccio. There is very little to choose between us. We are hereditary sinners!"

She was a Braccio herself, and Corona laughed, though she knew there was truth in the saying. The Braccio people had many friends, but so far as the Corleone were concerned, all Rome agreed with Donna Francesca, and congratulated the Saracinesca, quite regardless of the fact that Ippolito was not really acquitted.

But Corona was not as she had been before, and her eyes followed Ippolito about, when he was within sight, with a sort of wondering, anxious expression that showed how perpetually her thoughts were occupied with him.

CHAPTER XXXII

ORSINO made an attempt to see Vittoria on the day after his return. The liveried porter put his ear to the speaking-tube as of old, and then, shaking his head, told Orsino that the ladies could see no one. He volunteered the information that Donna Maria Carolina was very ill, and that her servants believed her to be out of her mind, since the death of her second son. The young lady did not go out every day, he said. When she did, he always heard her tell the coachman to drive to the Hotel Bristol. There were two sisters of the French order of the Bon Secours who took turns as nurses, with her mother. The doctor came twice daily, and sometimes three times. The porter had asked the doctor about Donna Maria Carolina, and he had answered that she was in no danger of her life. That was all.

The porter, as has been said, volunteered the information; but if he did so, it was because he knew Orsino and had read in the newspaper a full account of Francesco's death, and of the hearing at Messina. Being a good Roman, he felt personally outraged at the idea that any member

of a great old Roman house should be accused of killing a Sicilian gentleman. He might kill him, if he chose, the porter thought, but it was an abominable insult to accuse him of it. The man had never liked Francesco, who had been stingy and self-indulgent, spending money on himself, but never giving a present to a servant if he could help it, and generally ready to find fault with everything. Tebaldo was not mean. Orsino, when he gave at all, gave lavishly, and he gave whenever he happened to think of it, as he did to-day. The porter bowed low; as much to the bank-note as to the heir of all the Saracinesca, and Orsino went away.

He wondered why Vittoria went to the Hotel Bristol whenever she went out. He remembered having once or twice left cards there on foreigners, but he could not remember their names. He might recognize them, however, if he saw them, and he drove to the hotel at once. Looking down the list of the guests, he immediately came upon the names of Mrs. and Miss Slayback, and he remembered how it had been said of late that the young American girl was to marry Tebaldo Pagliuca. It was tolerably clear that these were the people whom Vittoria visited when she went out at all. Orsino remembered that he had been introduced to them at some party. Without the smallest hesitation he sent up his card to Mrs.

Slayback, and in a very short time was requested to go upstairs.

Mrs. Slayback received him with cool interest, and showed no surprise at his visit.

"I have been in Sicily most of the time since I had the pleasure of being introduced, or I should have done myself the honour of calling sooner," said Orsino, rather formally.

"Of course," answered Mrs. Slayback. "I quite understood."

She was silent, as though expecting him to open the conversation. That, at least, was what he thought.

"You are staying in Rome very late," he began. "Of course it is cool here compared with Sicily, and June is really one of our best months, but, as a rule, foreigners are afraid of the heat."

But she had not wanted that sort of conversation, and had only been making up her mind how she should speak, being taken at short notice by his visit. He was a good deal surprised at what she said.

"Please do not talk about the weather, Don Orsino," she began. "I am very glad that you have come to see me, for I am in great perplexity. I know that you will tell me the truth, and you may help me. Will you?"

"Certainly," answered Orsino, becoming grave at once. "Anything that I could do —" He waited.

"My niece is engaged to be married to Don Tebaldo Pagliuca. She is an orphan, a niece of my husband's, and is—well—rich, to say the least of it. She has fallen in love with this young Sicilian and insists upon marrying him. The Romans say that it is a family of brigands. You shot one of them in self-defence not long ago, and now the papers say that your brother has killed Don Francesco, whom we knew. It is rather an awful double tragedy for civilized modern life, you know. Such things happen with us in the West, though not so often as formerly, but they do not happen to people who live in New York, for instance."

"I hope not," said Orsino, gravely. "Sicily is a good deal less civilized than your West, I fancy. But I assure you that my brother did not kill Francesco Pagliuca, though I believe he knows who did kill him. He only tells me that he did not, and I am willing to give my word for him, on the strength of his."

"But Don Tebaldo gave evidence on oath that he saw your brother do it," objected Mrs. Slayback.

"And Don Tebaldo is engaged to marry your niece," answered Orsino. "You will allow me to say that the fact silences me."

"I hope not," said Mrs. Slayback, "for I do not wish my niece to marry him. I come to you for

an argument against the marriage. I do not wish to silence you, as you call it."

"You know Don Tebaldo very well," replied Orsino. "You have probably formed an opinion about his character. I am in a very difficult position with regard to him, myself."

He wondered whether Vittoria, growing intimate with the American girl, had spoken of him.

"Your position cannot be half so hard as mine."

Mrs. Slayback spoke with a conviction which reassured him, and he merely bent his head a little, as though assenting to what she said.

"It is clear," she continued, "that since you know that Don Tebaldo has sworn to this evidence, while you yourself, on your brother's word, are willing to swear to the contrary, you believe that Don Tebaldo is deliberately perjuring himself. That is perfectly clear, is it not?"

Orsino said nothing, but he could hardly keep from smiling a little at her directness.

"Very well," she went on; "should you allow your niece, or your sister, or anyone belonging to you, to marry a man who has deliberately perjured himself?"

"You are perfectly logical," said Orsino.

"Oh, perfectly! I always was thought so, in my family. And now that you have helped me so far, for which I am really very grateful, can you

tell me whether Don Tebaldo is coming back to Rome at once?"

"I am sorry, but I know nothing of his movements. I believe you know his sister, Donna Vittoria, very well, do you not? I should think she might be able to tell you. His mother is very ill, poor lady."

He had taken the first possible opportunity of introducing Vittoria's name.

"Vittoria comes to see Lizzie whenever she can get out for an hour," answered Mrs. Slayback. "But yesterday, when she was here, she did not know anything about her brother. I think she does not like to talk of him, for some reason or other. Have you seen her lately?"

She asked the question very naturally and easily.

"No," said Orsino. "Her mother is ill, and she has no one else with her. She could not receive me, of course."

"I suppose not. She could in America. She is sure to come to-morrow afternoon about five o'clock, I should think, unless her mother is much worse. We shall be very glad to see you if you like to come in for a cup of tea."

"You are very kind — very kind, indeed, and I will come with pleasure," Orsino answered, surprised and delighted by the unexpected invitation.

"That is," said Mrs. Slayback, as though cor-

recting herself, and not heeding his answer, "that is, you know, if you have no objection to meeting Donna Vittoria after all this dreadful business. If you have, come in the next day, and we shall be alone, I daresay."

Again Orsino found it hard not to smile, though he was very far indeed from anything like mirth.

"It would be more likely that Donna Vittoria might object to seeing me," he said.

"Oh, no!" replied Mrs. Slayback, with alacrity. "I think she likes you, by the way she sometimes speaks of you, and she does not believe her brother any more than you or I do, I can see, though she does not quite say so. Indeed, I hardly understand her. She wears black, of course, and they see no one since that poor man's death, but she comes here just the same. As for being sad, she was always sad, ever since I knew her."

"She has had enough to sadden her," said Orsino, gravely. "None of us who have been concerned in this dreadful affair can be anything but sad just now."

When he went away he could not make up his mind as to whether Mrs. Slayback knew anything of his love for Vittoria or not. Foreigners, and especially Americans, were unlike other people, he thought. It never would have occurred to any Roman lady, a mere acquaintance, to ask him to come for a cup of tea and meet two young girls.

An intimate friend might have done it, in order to do him a service, but not a mere acquaintance. But foreigners were different, as he knew.

He pondered the question all night, and the next day seemed very long until it was time to go up to the Hotel Bristol at five o'clock. He thought the correct Swiss porter's face relaxed a little when he saw the card Orsino gave, as if he had been told to expect him. This was the more apparent when Orsino was ushered upstairs at once.

He heard an exclamation in Vittoria's voice as he entered the drawing-room, and then for a moment he seemed to himself to lose consciousness, as he advanced. He had not known what it would be to be brought face to face with her after all that had happened.

Neither she nor Miss Slayback saw anything unusual in his face as he came forward, and the latter certainly had no idea how disturbed he was, as she smilingly held out her hand to him. Vittoria had uttered the one little cry of surprise, and then she felt very cold and frightened for a moment, after which she apparently regained her composure.

"My aunt is lying down in the next room, so it is perfectly proper," said Miss Slayback, in the very words she had used to Tebaldo.

Her voice brought Orsino back to lively conscious-

ness at once, and as he sat down nearly opposite to the two young girls, he glanced from the one to the other quickly, before looking long at Vittoria. Miss Lizzie seemed worn and harassed, he thought, and much less pretty than when he had last seen her. There was a nervous restlessness about her, and she was unable to sit still for a moment without moving her hands, or her head, or her shoulders, to look round, when there was nothing to look at.

Vittoria's gentle young face was undeniably sad. She did not look weary like her friend, for she was not naturally nervous; but there was something shadowy and half ethereal about her eyes and features that moved Orsino strangely. He made a civil remark to Miss Slayback, in order not to be silent, and she answered him in short, broken little sentences. Somehow the whole position seemed odd to him. All at once Miss Lizzie rose to her feet.

"I knew I had forgotten something!" she said. "It is the day for letters to catch the French steamer, and I have not written to Uncle Ben. I always write him a line once a week. Do you mind amusing Don Orsino, Vittoria? Just a moment, you know—I can write a letter in ten minutes."

And before Vittoria could answer, she was gone, talking as she went, and not looking back. As the

door closed after her, Orsino was beside Vittoria, with both her hands hidden in his and looking into her face. She met his eyes for a moment, and her head sank on his breast, as though she were very tired.

"It is not meant to be, love," she said, and he could but just hear the words.

"It shall be, whether it is meant or not," he answered, bending down to her little ear.

"It is all too terrible!" She shook her head against his coat, hiding her face. "Nothing but death, death, everywhere—my poor brothers—one after the other." She roused herself and laid her hands upon his shoulders, looking up suddenly into his face with wide, searching eyes. "Tell me that Ippolito did not kill him!" she begged. "Tell me that it is not true! I shall believe you. I cannot believe myself, when I say it."

"It is not true," answered Orsino, earnestly. "I will pledge you what you will for my brother, my word of honour—everything. It is not true." He repeated the words slowly and emphatically.

"I know it is not, when you say it." Her head sank upon his shoulder. "But it is all so terrible, so horrible! Tebaldo killed him. I know it. I knew he would, when I saw his face that night, after they had quarrelled. Tebaldo has put it upon your brother—I know it, though I do not know how it was."

He kissed her hair, for he could not see her face.

"It is a worse crime than if Ippolito had killed him to defend himself," she said. "I feel—I do not know—but I love you so—and yet—oh, Orsino, Orsino! How will it all end?"

She rocked herself a little, to and fro, her forehead against his coat, and her hand twisted painfully upon his, but there were no tears in her voice, for she had shed all she had in the lonely nights since she had seen him last.

"It shall end in our way," said Orsino, in the low tone that means most with a man.

"You and I? Married?" Again she shook her head. "Oh, no! It will be different—the end! I am not cowardly, but this is killing me. My mother—" She lowered her voice still more, and hesitated. "My mother is going mad, they say."

Orsino wondered how fate could do more than it had done upon the Corleone.

"Nothing shall take you from me," he said, his arms going round her and folding her to him. "Nothing, neither death, nor madness, nor sorrow."

She was silent for a moment, and the mirage of happiness rose in the mist of tears.

"But it is not possible," she said, as the brief vision faded. "You know it is not possible. Ippolito did not do it—I know. There is not that to separate us. But you could not take the

sister of such brothers as mine have been to be your wife. How could you? And your father, your mother—all that great family of yours—they would not have me, they would not—oh, it is impossible! Do not talk to me of it, love. It will make it harder to die.”

“To die? You?” His voice rang with life.

Suddenly, and for the first time since he had loved her, he pressed her head gently backwards, and his lips met hers.

She started, and a little shiver ran to her small hands, and her eyelids dropped till they closed, and still he kissed her, long and passionately. And the colour rose slowly in her cheeks when her pulse beat again, for it had stopped a moment, and then she hid the scarlet blush against his coat, and heard the heavy, mysterious beating of his heart through flesh and bone and cloth,—the strong, deep sound which no woman forgets who has heard it, and has known that it was for her.

“You can make me live,” she said softly. “But not without you,” she added, drawing a deep breath between.

“Together,” he answered. “Always together, to the very end.”

Then, by degrees, as the great wave of passion subsided, they talked more quietly, he with perfect confidence in the future, and she more hopefully, and they forgot Miss Lizzie and her letter,

till they heard her move the handle of the door. They both started.

"Does she know?" asked Orsino, quickly.

"I never told her," Vittoria had time to answer, before Miss Slayback could hear.

"I have written such a nice long letter to Uncle Ben," said the young girl, airily. "I hope you have not bored yourselves! Not that I am very amusing myself," she added, pausing before a mirror, on her way along the side of the room. "And I am a perfect fright! Just look at my eyes. Oh, well, it does not matter! Don Orsino does not mind, and I am sure you do not, Vittoria, do you?"

It was the girl's way of trying to jest at what was a real pain, if it was not a very great sorrow. It was not very successful, and her worn little face betrayed her, as well as the dark lines under her eyes. She had believed herself very much in love with Tebaldo, and, to tell the truth, she was in love with him still, so far as she had yet any idea of what it meant to be in love. But she had just made up her mind that she could never marry him. It was not possible to marry into such a family, where everybody was always killing everybody else, as Mrs. Slayback expressed it. The friends of the Saracinesca had found a great deal to say about the previous history of the whole tribe of Pagliuca d'Oriani, including the Corleone

of old, during the last four days, and much of it had got into the Roman papers, which all took part against the Sicilians. Romance was very well, up to a certain point, Miss Lizzie thought, but it was necessary to draw the line somewhere, and she had drawn it now. Yet her heart ached for the fierce-eyed Sicilian, all the same, and her small face was weary and careworn.

CHAPTER XXXIII

TEBALDO's nerves were beginning to give way. It was of no use for him to argue with himself, and tell himself that the knife would not be found. He knew that the possibility existed. No one in Santa Vittoria would look for it, but there was the bishop, who would shortly reconsecrate the church, and there was the judge, who had told San Giacinto that he might go up to visit the scene of the murder. The bishop might order the grating to be opened in order to see the bones of the saint; and the judge, accustomed to the ways of criminals, might insist upon a search, seeing that the murder had taken place within arm's length of the altar.

In his broken dreams, the judge and the bishop appeared separately and together and turned into each other, and invariably found the knife, and then Tebaldo was suddenly in the courtroom, at the bar, where Ippolito had stood, instead of on the witness stand, and he heard all the people yell and curse his name, as the villagers of Santa Vittoria had cursed the young priest. As in the old days of torture a man was drawn up by his hands to the high vault of the prison, and then dropped all at

once with a hideous wrenching and tearing of the joints till his feet were but a foot from the floor, so Tebaldo's sudden waking was but a sudden change of agony renewed each time and each time more unendurable, till the fear of dreaming was outdone by the dread of returning to consciousness.

When he was awake he imagined impossible schemes for getting possession of the knife unobserved. It might have seemed simple enough to go up to Santa Vittoria, call the sacristan, and have the church opened for him. Then he could have invented an excuse for sending the fat man away while he quietly reached down through the grating and felt for the knife. In his ordinary state of mind and health he would have done that, and there were ninety-nine chances in a hundred that he would have succeeded.

But it looked differently to him now. In the first place, a sheer physical horror of going back to the village at all had taken the place of the cynical indifference which had at first left his cunning and his coolness free to act. Everyone who has dealt with humanity under the influence of pain or fear knows that the effect of either is cumulative, and that in each individual there seems to be a limit beyond which the nerves will resist no more, and the will power altogether ceases. A man may bear a certain grievous pain on the first day without

a sign; on the second day he will grind his teeth; on the third he will wince; later he will groan, writhe, and at last break down, like a mere child, under one-tenth of the suffering he bore manfully and silently at first. And it is the same with any given fear. In a smaller degree it is so also in the matter of losing one's temper under constantly renewed irritation of the same kind. Even in another direction, but in one which equally concerns the nerves, this thing is true. Often, in a farce on the stage, an indifferent action passes unnoticed; it recurs and excites attention; again it comes, and the audience smile; once more and they laugh, and cannot control their laughter each time the action is repeated, until a certain capacity for being moved to mirth again and again in one direction, which varies in each individual, is momentarily paralyzed. People afterwards realize with surprise, and sometimes with a little shame, the emptiness of the absurdities at which they have laughed so heartily; as many a man has despised himself for having been angry at a trifle, and wondered at his own weakness in having winced under an insignificant pain. But the trifle is only the drop that overfills the cup at last.

So Tebaldo had almost reached the limit of endurance, and the mere idea of going back to the village and the church was intolerable to him. It seemed to him that even if he could make up his

mind to the attempt, he should be sure to fail. The sacristan would come back unexpectedly and find him with his hand through the grating, groping after the knife; or the lame boy, who always hung about the gate, would look in and see him. Yet he could not have locked himself into the church, for that also would have excited suspicion.

The idea that he might get someone else to recover the weapon for him took hold of him by degrees. At first it appeared to be madness to trust anyone with his secret, and his keen sense rejected the plan with scorn. But it suggested itself again and again with increasing persistence, because the mere thought that he might get the thing back without going to Santa Vittoria in person was an inexpressible relief, and he began to try and think of some person whom he could trust to be prompt and secret.

At first he thought of asking someone in Santa Vittoria. The fat sacristan, whom he had known for years, could do it easily. But Tebaldo recognized at once that he had no hold upon the man, who might betray him at any moment. Money would tempt the fellow, but no sum could silence him afterwards, if he should demand more, as was very probable. Besides, it would be necessary to write to him, and the man might lose the letter, even if he were able to read it well enough to understand, which was doubtful. There was Don

Atanasio, the apothecary. He would do much out of hatred for the Saracinesca, as his daughter had done already. But he was a cautious old man, dependent, in a large measure, upon the government, and would not be inclined to endanger his position to oblige Tebaldo. It would not do to risk a refusal.

Then it occurred to the wretched man that women had more than once saved men who loved them from desperate danger, and that, after all, he might do worse than to tell Aliandra the truth. If she were willing, she could go up to Santa Vittoria on a pretext and visit the little church, and get rid of the sacristan. Then, if she wore a wide cloak, she could kneel down on pretence of looking through the grating, and her slim woman's arm could run through it in a moment, and her hand could not fail to find the knife. He could remember, now, exactly at how many inches from the left he had dropped it through. The details came back to him with vivid clearness, though at first he had almost quite forgotten them.

He almost made up his mind to go to Aliandra for assistance, and the half decision was a sudden and immense relief. He could eat and drink and he felt that he should sleep. Immediately his mind outran this first plan, and he saw himself in Rome again, in three or four days at the most,

engaged to marry the great heiress, resuming his regular life of wise courtship, and discussing with his future wife the details of a brilliant existence. He drove away the subconsciousness that the thing was not yet done and revelled in visions in which there was no fear.

But that did not last long, for he could not sleep, after all; and the knowledge that he must act quickly grew constantly more disturbing, till he rose in the night and sat by the open window, working out his plan. He must go to Randazzo again and see Aliandra; then he must wait at the inn, while she went up to Santa Vittoria. The hours of waiting would be hard to bear, but at the end of them there would be freedom. She would come back, and he should see her pass. He should go to her father's house. She would meet him at the door and draw him into the familiar sitting-room, and a moment later the weapon would be in his hand. After all, if he once had it, she could have no proof against him, beyond her mere assertion, if she should ever turn against him. For the sake of his love for her, she would never do that, he thought.

He telegraphed to Tatò at dawn to meet him at the Piedimonte station. It was a Thursday, and he felt sure that the judge would not be at leisure to go up to Santa Vittoria before Sunday. It was most probable, too, that the bishop would choose

the Sunday to reconsecrate the church, and it occurred to Tebaldo that it would be strange if the two should meet as they were always meeting in his dreams. But there was plenty of time before that, and all would come right. Aliandra would not refuse to do him this service.

Tatò met him at Piedimonte in person, instead of sending down his man, and in obedience to Tebaldo's telegram he had brought a light conveyance in which the two sat side by side, with Tebaldo's little valise at their feet, and his rifle between them. They were old acquaintances, for Tatò had driven the Corleone family for years himself, and by deputy, as it were, while he had been serving his time in Ponza. He had a profound respect for Tebaldo, for he knew how the latter with his brothers had long ago led the soldiers astray when pursuing the brigands in the neighbourhood of Camaldoli. There was probably no man in that part of the country who knew as much about people of all sorts and conditions, and about their movements, as the smart-looking owner of the stable at Piedimonte, nor anyone who could keep his own council better. He was a thorough type of the 'maffeuoso,' at all points, as San Giacinto had at first observed to Orsino. San Giacinto had always believed that the man had known of Ferdinando's intended attack, and of the pitfall in the avenue.

Tatò told Tebaldo that he had driven San Giacinto alone up to Camaldoli on the previous evening, returning during the night.

"What courage!" he exclaimed, with some genuine admiration, as he spoke of the big man. "After all that has happened! He is a man of iron, full of courage and blood."

"There was no particular danger in driving up to Camaldoli," observed Tebaldo, indifferently.

Tatò looked at him curiously for a moment, to see whether he were in earnest.

"Then you do not know?" he enquired. "They are in the woods above Maniace."

'They' means the outlaws, or the carabinieri, as the sense requires.

Tebaldo looked quickly at Tatò in his turn.

"How many?" he asked.

"A dozen or fifteen," said Tatò. "There is Mauro, and Leoncino, and the one they call Schiantaceci—he was a gentleman of Palermo, but no one knows his real name, and the Moscio—eh, there are many! Who knows all their names? But Mauro is with them."

"Leoncino is a good man," observed Tebaldo, quite naturally.

"Souls of his dead! You have spoken the truth. It was he that wore the carabineer's uniform when they took the Duca di Fornasco's bailiff. He has a face like a stone. Yet Mauro himself is

the best of them, though he is often ill with his liver. You know the life they lead. The food is sometimes good, but sometimes it is badly cooked, and they eat in a hurry, and then that poor Mauro's liver troubles him."

"Why have they come over from Noto? Do you know?"

"For a change of air, I suppose," answered Tatò, imperturbably. "But they say that the Fornasco is coming from Naples. Perhaps they would like to try for the Saracinesca. Who knows what they want?"

"Do the carabinieri know that they are near Maniace?"

"How should they know? Mauro and the Leoncino rode into Santa Vittoria yesterday afternoon to see — good health to you — to see where Don Francesco died. They asked the little lieutenant of infantry to tell them the way to the church, as though they were strangers. Do you think he has their photographs in his pocket? He took them for two farmers going from Catania to Randazzo."

"They might have caught San Giacinto last night when you drove him up," said Tebaldo.

"If everyone knew where to look for money, there would be no poor men," returned Tatò. "They did not know about the Saracinesca, and the carabinieri do not know about them. Thus the

world goes. Each man turns his back on his fortune and chases flies. Should you not like to see the Moscio, Don Tebaldo? You know that it was he who helped that angel of paradise, Don Ferdinando. He goes everywhere, for he is not known."

"Yes. I should like to see him. But I do not care to go up to the Maniace woods, for I am known, though he is not. How can I see him? I should like to ask him about my brother."

"Where shall you stay to-night?" enquired Tatò.

"At the inn at Randazzo. I am not going to Santa Vittoria. I have business with Basili."

"I will arrange it," answered Tatò. "Leave it to me."

Tebaldo assented and remained silent for some time. As they drove on, nearer and nearer to Randazzo, the folly of his present plan became clear to him, and in the place of Aliandra, as an agent for getting back the knife, the possibility of employing the young outlaw known as the Moscio presented itself, and the possibility of confiding freely in a man whose position was ten times more desperate than his own, and whose evidence could never be of any value in the eyes of the law. Mauro himself was under obligations to Tebaldo, who could have betrayed him to the authorities on more than one occasion, less than a year earlier.

Again and again both Mauro and the Moscio, as well as three or four others of the band, had been at Camaldoli, and the Corleone had given them food and drink and ammunition at a time when a great effort had been made to catch them.

"Are you quite sure of being able to send a message to the Moscio?" asked Tebaldo.

"Leave it to me," said Tatò, again. "I have a little bundle for him in the back of the waggon. How do I know what is in it? It feels like new clothes from the tailor in Messina. The Moscio is fond of good clothes. He writes to his tailor, who sends the things when he can, by a sure hand. You know how they live, as well as I do. They always wear new clothes, and give their old things to the peasants, because they can only carry little with them. And then, they are well brought up and are accustomed to be clean. But I speak as though you were a Roman. You know how they live. The Moscio will have his bundle this afternoon, and this evening he will come down and have supper with you at Randazzo, at the inn. I know this, therefore I asked if you wished to see him, and not another."

Before Randazzo was in sight, Tebaldo had quite made up his mind to confide in the outlaw, and he could hardly have believed that he had left Messina that morning with the firm intention of imploring Aliandra to help him. But he looked

forward to seeing her and to spending most of the afternoon with her.

He was disappointed. Everything happened exactly as at his last visit. Basili's man appeared at the door of the house, instead of from the stable, and gave precisely the same message. Aliandra had taken Gesualda to the country to visit some friends, and had not come back. No one knew when she meant to come.

"Tell me something else," said Tebaldo, offering the man money, for he knew that the story could not be true.

The man threw back his head in refusal.

"You might give me also Peru," he answered. "This is the truth, and this I have told you."

"I should like to see Signor Basili," said Tebaldo, thinking that he might get into the house.

"The notary sleeps," answered the man, stolidly, and he began to shut the door.

To force an entrance seemed out of the question, and Tebaldo went away angry and disappointed. He could see that it would be of no use to try again, for the same answer would be given to his enquiries. It was enraging to know that the woman he loved was within a few yards of him, and able to keep him away from her. But his anger was a relief from the perpetual anxiety about the knife, which was wearing out his nerves, day and night.

In the afternoon he shut himself up in the room he had taken and tried to write to Aliandra, but he was in no condition for composing love-letters. He could find nothing but reproaches for her unkindness in refusing to admit him; and as soon as he had expressed them, he felt that his own words exhibited him in an absurdly undignified position. Besides, he was really waiting in the unconscious hope of explaining her conduct to himself, when he knew that it was as yet inexplicable. Meanwhile he tore up the pages he had covered, and threw the whole blame upon Basili, unwilling to admit that the woman he loved could turn against him.

In the hot hours of the afternoon he shut the windows and dozed restlessly on a hard sofa, and his evil dreams came upon him once more and tormented him, waking him again and again just when the sweetness of rest was within reach. At last, his body being very weary, the dreams could no longer wake him, and tortured him at their will while he lay in a heavy sleep.

It was already dark when he awoke with a start. The door had opened, and a youth was standing beside him holding a candle in a brass candlestick, shading the flame a little with the other hand and looking down into his face.

"I regret that I disturb you," said the young man, in a gentle, girlish voice. "I hope you have slept well?"

Tebaldo was already sitting up on the sofa, and had recognized the Moscio. The outlaw could not have been more than twenty-two years old, and looked a mere boy. He was of medium height, delicately made, very carefully shaved, and dressed with a sort of careless good taste, wearing a black velvet jacket, immaculate linen, riding-trousers with gaiters, patent leather shoes, and silver-plated spurs. He was hatless, and his short, soft brown hair curled all over his head, close and fine, like curly Astrachan fur. There was a tender, youthful freshness in his skin, and he had beautiful teeth. He had studied for the bar and had been driven to outlawry because, failing to pass his final examination, he had shot his teacher through the head at the first opportunity. But he had killed a number of men since then and had almost forgotten the incident.

Tebaldo rose to his feet and greeted him.

"A friend told me you were here and wished to see me," said the Moscio. "I am at your service, though to tell the truth I am somewhat ashamed to meet you, after that unfortunate affair at Camaldoli."

"Why?" asked Tebaldo. "I do not see —"

"It was I that fired over the carriage to draw away the escort," replied the other. "Your poor brother was too enthusiastic. I was afraid that something would happen to him, for the plan did

not seem to be very well thought out. In a manner I feel responsible for his misfortune, for I should not have consented to what he proposed. I hope, however, that there need be no bad blood between you and me on that account."

"Ferdinando was always foolish," answered Tebaldo. "It was certainly not your fault."

"And now you have had another misfortune in the family," said the youth, sadly. "I take the first opportunity of offering you my most sincere condolence."

Tebaldo knew that with such a man it was better to be frank, or to say nothing. He bowed gravely, and proposed that they should have supper. The Moscio answered with equal gravity, and made a little bow on his side, by way of acknowledgment.

"I was about to ask you to be my guest," he said. "I supped with you at Camaldoli the last time we met. We might have supper here in your room," he suggested. "But I fear to inconvenience you —"

"Not at all," replied Tebaldo. "I prefer it also. We shall be more at liberty to talk."

"For that matter," said the brigand, "the conversation in the public room is often amusing and sometimes instructive. The lieutenant of carabineers sat at the table next to me the last time I spent the evening here. He was very

friendly and asked my opinion about catching the Moscio."

"If you prefer to have supper downstairs, let us go down," said Tebaldo, laughing a little. "But the fact is that I wished to consult you on a little matter of my own."

"In that case, it is different. But it was I that proposed your room."

While the waiter came and went, preparing the table, the two men talked a little, continuing to exchange small civilities. The waiter knew them both perfectly well, and they knew him. In twenty minutes they sat down opposite each other, as proper and quiet a pair to see as one could have found in that part of the country. The Moscio had good manners, of a slightly provincial sort, and a little too elaborate. He watched Tebaldo quietly, with a view to profiting by the example of a gentleman who had lately been much in the capital. He ate sparingly, moreover, and mixed his black wine with a large proportion of water.

Tebaldo watched the girlish face, the bright, quiet eyes, and the child-like complexion of the man who had done half a dozen murders, and envied him his evident peace of mind. He knew, however, that his guest would not stay long, and that it was necessary to tell him the story. The Moscio gave him an opportunity of doing so, almost as soon as the waiter had gone away.

"It was with the deepest regret that I heard of Don Francesco's accident," he said, looking up at Tebaldo.

"For that matter," answered Tebaldo, boldly, "I killed him myself."

"I always supposed so," replied the outlaw, quite unmoved. "Are you going to join us, if you are found out? It would be a pleasure to have you among us, I need not assure you. But, of course, so long as there is no suspicion, you will remain in the world. I should, in your place. Poor Ferdinando, whom we all loved as a brother, liked the life for its own sake. Poor man! If he had ever made an enemy, he would have killed him, but having none, his hands were clean as a child's. And in his very first affair, he was shot like a quail by a Roman. Heaven is very unjust, sometimes. Yes, we all thought that you must have sent Francesco to paradise yourself and put the blame on the priest. It was well done. The priest will go to the galleys for it, I daresay."

The youth's manner was as quiet as though he were speaking of the most ordinary occurrences. The knowledge of what he really was, and of what desperate deeds of daring he had done, somehow acted soothingly upon Tebaldo's nerves, for he needed just such an ally.

"Yes," he said. "It was done well enough. But I made a little mistake which I hope you will

help me to rectify for the sake of any service I may have done you all before I sold Camaldoli."

"Willingly," answered the Moscio, with courteous alacrity. "But if it is for to-night, I hope you can lend me half a dozen Winchester cartridges, for I am a little short."

Tebaldo explained briefly what he wanted. The Moscio smiled quietly.

"Nothing could be easier," he said, when Tebaldo had finished. "I will ride into the village to-morrow morning and get your knife. But, for another time, I should advise you to keep your weapon about you when you have used it. If you are caught, it is because you are suspected already on some good ground, and the weapon makes little difference. But if you get away quietly, you leave no evidence behind you."

"That is true," answered Tebaldo, thoughtfully. "But there is no name on the knife."

"Nevertheless, someone might recognize it as yours, if anyone had ever seen it."

"No one ever saw it, excepting my brothers and, perhaps, my sister, when it lay on my table. But your advice is good. I might have saved myself much disquiet if I had brought it away."

The Moscio made Tebaldo explain very exactly to him where the knife lay. He knew the village and the position of the little church well enough.

They talked over the details of the matter for a while, speaking in low tones.

"I suppose you do not want the thing when I have recovered it," observed the outlaw, with a smile.

"I should like to see it," answered Tebaldo. "Then I should throw it away, I suppose."

"Again?" The Moscio smiled in a rather pitying way. "Then you might wish to get it back a second time. It has no name on it, you say. If it is a good knife, I shall put it into my own pocket, with your permission, as a remembrance of this very pleasant meeting."

"I should like to see it once," repeated Tebaldo.

"You do not trust me? After trusting me with the story? That is not right."

"I have proved that I trust you," replied Tebaldo. "But the thing makes me dream; I shall not get a good night's rest till I have seen it. Then keep it, by all means."

"I see!" The brigand laughed a little in genuine amusement. "I understand! Forgive me for thinking that I was not trusted. You have nerves—you do not sleep. We have a friend with us who is troubled in the same way. Do you remember the man we call Schiantaceci? He killed his sweetheart for jealousy, and began in that way. That was five years ago, in Palermo. If you will believe it, he dreams of her still, and

often cannot sleep for thinking of her. Some men are so strangely organized! Now there is our captain Mauro himself. Whenever he has killed anybody, he gets a gold twenty-franc piece and puts it into a little leathern purse he carries for that purpose."

"Why?" asked Tebaldo, with some curiosity.

"For two reasons. In the first place, he knows at any time how many he has killed. And secondly, he says they are intended to pay for masses for his soul when he is killed himself. One tells him that someone will get the gold, if he is killed. He answers that Heaven will respect his intention of having the masses said, even if it is not carried out when he is dead. That man has a genius for theology. But I must be going, Don Tebaldo, for I do not wish to tire my horse too much, and I have far to ride."

"I will not keep you. But how shall I see the knife? You cannot come down again to-morrow."

"We should be glad to see you in the forest, if you can find us. Mauro would be delighted. I have no doubt you will be able to find your way, for you know the woods as well as we do. I cannot tell you where we are, for we have a rule against that, but I daresay you can guess."

"I will come," answered Tebaldo.

"If you come alone, you will be safe," said the Moscio. "Safer than you are here, perhaps,

while your knife is lying under the altar of Santa Vittoria. But it will not be there any longer, to-morrow night."

The Moscio protested courteously, when Tebaldo thanked him, and he took leave of his entertainer. His coolness was perfectly unaffected, and was the more remarkable as he was certainly a rather striking young man on account of his good looks, his extremely youthful appearance, his perfectly new clothes, and a certain gentleman-like ease in all he did. He was known by sight to hundreds of people in various parts of the island, but he did not believe that any of them would betray him, and he passed the open door of the guest-room, where the lieutenant of carabineers was playing dominos with the deputy prefect, with perfect indifference, though there was a large reward on his head, and he was well known to the landlord and the waiter. To tell the truth, he was utterly fearless, and would never have allowed himself to be taken alive. But, on their side, if they were ever tempted by the reward, they knew how short and how terrible their own lives would be if they betrayed him to his death. The man who betrayed Leone still lives, indeed. He is a blind beggar now, without feet or hands, in the streets of Naples. He left Sicily with his life, such as the outlaws left it to him, to be an example and a terror to the enemies of the mafia.

Nor did the waiter show by any sign or word that he knew anything about the guest who had gone, when he came to clear the little table in Tebaldo's room. He did his work silently and neatly and went away. Tebaldo sat a long time by the open window, thinking over what he had done, and he congratulated himself on having acted wisely in an extremity from which there had been no other escape.

It all looked easy and simple now. To-morrow night, he thought, he should be sure of his safety. Then he would return to Rome again. His thoughts reverted more easily now to the dreams which Rome suggested, and he fell asleep with a sense of present relief mingled with large hopes for the immediate future.

The Moscio, on his part, would not perhaps have responded so promptly to Tebaldo's message, nor have undertaken so readily to carry out Tebaldo's wishes, if there had been nothing for the outlaws to gain thereby. But the alliance of such a man was not to be neglected at any time. He had served them in the past, and he could be of considerable service to them now.

Mauro had made up his mind to take one of the Saracinesca, if the capture were possible, and to extort an enormous ransom, sufficient to allow him to leave the country with what he should consider a fortune. He was well informed, and he recog-

nized that a family which had such power as the Saracinesca had shown in getting Ippolito's case heard and disposed of in a few days, and, previously, in persuading the authorities to move a body of troops to Santa Vittoria, must be able to dispose of a very large sum of money. Moreover, as the Moscio had frankly admitted, the outlaws had all believed that Tebaldo had killed his brother, and, consequently, that he could be completely dominated by anyone who had proof of the fact. The Moscio had taken advantage of this instantly, as has been seen. Tebaldo, though now on bad terms with the Saracinesca, was well acquainted with their habits and characters, and knew, also, the by-paths about Camaldoli, as none of the brigands themselves did. He could be of the greatest use in an undertaking which must require all the skill and courage of the band. For it was no light thing to carry off such a man as San Giacinto or Orsino, protected as they were by a force of carabinieri in their own dwelling, and by the fifty soldiers of the line who were quartered in Santa Vittoria.

When Tatò's message had arrived, Mauro had not only advised the Moscio to go down at once, but had instructed him to use every means in his power, even to threatening Tebaldo with a revelation of his former services, in order to get from him the truth about Francesco's death, as a means

of controlling him in the future. It had been an easy task, as has been seen, and when the Moscio returned to the band that night, his account of the meeting was heard with profound attention and interest.

Mauro, who had a curious taste for churches, would have gone himself to Santa Vittoria, had he not been there on the previous day. A second visit might have roused suspicion, whereas, since the murder, no one was surprised if a stranger asked to see the place where it had happened. The Moscio was, therefore, directed to go himself, as he had intended.

The outlaws were encamped at that time in certain abandoned huts which the Duca di Fornasco had built as a safe retreat for some of his people during the cholera season of 1884. They were so completely hidden by underbrush and sweet hawthorn that it required a perfect knowledge of their locality to find them at all; but having been built on an eminence in the hills, in order to obtain the purest air, it was easy to keep a lookout from them, by climbing into the big trees which surrounded them on all sides. A spring, situated on the eastern slope, at a distance of three hundred yards, supplied the outlaws with water for themselves and their horses. Tebaldo, in former days, had led the carabinieri to this spring, in their search for the band, but though the soldiers fan-

cied that they had then quartered the hillside in all directions, Tebaldo had skilfully prevented them from coming upon the disused huts in the brush, wisely judging that it could be of no use to betray such a hiding-place, which might be useful to his friends in the future. The Moscio knew that Tebaldo would probably make first for the spot when he came to keep his engagement on the following day.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE Moscio slung saddle-bags over his saddle, as though he were travelling some distance, and led his horse down from the huts by by-paths in the woods till he came to a place where the trees descended almost to the road, so that he could reach the latter without crossing any open country. Before emerging from cover he looked long and carefully up and down the valley to be sure that no carabineers were in sight, who might be surprised at seeing a well-dressed man come out of the forest. A few peasants were visible, straggling along the road, and far away a light waggon was ascending the hill. The Moscio led his horse carefully across the ditch, and then mounted in leisurely fashion and rode slowly away towards Santa Vittoria. The outlaw, who may at any moment need his horse's greatest powers, spares him whenever he can, and when not obliged to escape some danger will hardly ever put him to a canter.

It was a full hour before the village was in sight. Once on the highway, the Moscio felt perfectly at his ease, and barely took the trouble to glance be-

hind him at a turn of the road. He had excellent papers of various descriptions about him, including a United States passport of recent date, in which he appeared as an American citizen, and a proper discharge as corporal from the military service, together with a highly commendatory letter from the captain of the troop in which the unlucky individual to whom the paper had belonged had served his time in Milan. He also possessed a gun license in the same man's name, and the description of him which accompanied it suited him very well. Some of the papers he had bought at a good price, and some he had taken without much ceremony, because they suited him. To-day he did not even carry a gun and was, in reality, altogether unarmed, though he would naturally have been supposed to have a pistol or a knife about him, like other people in Sicily. If anyone had asked his name, he would have said that he was Angelo Laria of Caltanissetta, a small farmer. The name corresponded with the papers of the soldier, and as he was unarmed it would have been hard to find any excuse for arresting him on a mere suspicion.

If a man carries so-called forbidden weapons, on the other hand, the carabinieri can arrest him for that offence alone, if they find it out, and can hold him till he can prove his identity. A knife, such as one can stab with, is forbidden, and the special

license, which is required to carry a pistol, is not often granted except to very well known persons, though a vast number of people really carry revolvers without any license at all.

The Moscio dismounted at the gate, walked up the street with his horse, enquired for the sacristan, and brought him back to the little church with the keys.

"Have the goodness to hold my horse," he said to the fat man. "I only wish to look at the church for curiosity, and I will go in alone."

The sacristan did not know him by sight, but with a true Sicilian's instinct recognized the 'maffeu' in his manner. He proposed, however, to tether the horse to an old stake that was driven into the ground near the door, in order to go in with the stranger and explain how the priest had murdered Francesco. He had got the account off very glibly by this time.

"My friend," said the Moscio, "in those saddlebags I have important papers and a quantity of valuable things, the property of an aunt of mine who is dead, and may the Lord preserve her in glory! I am taking these things myself, for greater safety, to my cousin, her son, who lives in Taormina. Now the reason why I begged you to hold my horse is not that I fear for him, though he is a good animal, but because some evilly disposed person might steal the property of my poor aunt.

You understand, and you will have the goodness to hold the horse while I go in."

The sacristan looked at him and smiled. The Moscio smiled very sweetly in answer, pushed the door open and went in, closing it behind him and leaving the keys on the outside. But when he was in the church, he took from his pocket a small wedge of soft pine wood, gently slipped in under the door and jammed it noiselessly. It would have been rather difficult to open the door from the outside after that. Then he walked leisurely up the church, his spurs ringing loudly so that the sacristan might hear through the door that he was in no hurry.

He went up the altar steps, and smiled as he noticed a few round, dark spots on the marble, and one irregular stain. That was the very place where it had happened. He knelt down and tried to put his arm through the grating, but the space was too narrow. With the same leisurely certainty he slipped off his velvet jacket and laid it on the altar, rolled up his sleeves, and tried again, with his bare arm. No one, seeing him in his coat, and glancing at his small hands, would have suspected the solid muscles above. Even now the grating was too close. It was of light iron, however, and twisted in a decorative design. He easily forced a scroll in one direction, a winding stem in another, and got his hand down to the

bottom of the depression in which the glass casket was placed.

He withdrew the knife, and slipped it into the pocket of his riding-breeches; then he readjusted the iron ornaments, buttoned his shirt sleeve, and put on his jacket. As he walked down the church again he took the weapon out. The broad blade was stuck in its black leathern sheath, and it required all his strength to loosen it. When he got it out, he saw that the steel was covered with dark rust.

It was a pity, he thought, as he dropped it into his pocket again, for it had evidently been a good knife. He would clean it with sand and a brick, and sharpen it on a stone, during the evenings, not because he could not have got a better one easily enough, but because it was an agreeable and interesting remembrance. He drew the wedge from under the door without making any noise and went out into the open air. The fat sacristan had lit a clay pipe with a wild cherrywood stem, and was slowly walking the horse up and down in the shade. The Moscio took a small note from a neat pocketbook. Even when notes are scarce, in the wild finances of modern Italy, the outlaws manage to have them because they are easily carried.

"Do you wish me to change it for you?" enquired the sacristan, holding the flimsy bit of paper between his thumb and finger.

"Keep it for yourself, my friend, with a thousand thanks," replied the Moscio.

But the sacristan refused, and held the note out to him, returning it.

"We are not of that kind," he said, with dignity. "We do not wish to be paid for courtesy."

"There are doubtless many poor persons in the village," answered the Moscio, smiling, and beginning to mount. "You will do me a favour by giving the money to those who need it, requesting them to pray for the soul of my poor aunt."

"In that case it is different," replied the fat man, gravely. "I thank you in the name of our poor people. As for me, I am always here to serve you and your friends."

The Moscio glanced at the man's face as the last words were spoken. Tebaldo had told him who the sacristan was, and had described him accurately.

"A greeting to your brother, Don Taddeo the grocer," said the outlaw, settling himself in the saddle.

The sacristan looked up sharply. Being cross-eyed, it was almost impossible to know with which eye he was looking at one. But the expression did not change as he answered.

"Thank you. You shall be obeyed. Our service to your friends."

They understood each other perfectly well, and

the Moscio rode slowly away into the brilliant light, leaving the fat man to lock up the church and go home. The outlaw had made a friend of him, but had not thought fit to ask him any questions about the state of the village or the movements of the Saracinesca. It was of no use to go any further than necessary at a first meeting, and the band had plenty of good sources of information.

Tebaldo spent the morning in a sort of feverish anxiety against which he struggled in vain. He went out for a stroll and passed twice before Basili's house. The weather was beginning to be hot, and the blinds were as tightly closed as though the house were not inhabited. As he passed for the second time he fancied he heard Aliandra's voice singing softly in the distance. He could hardly have been mistaken, for it had the quality and carrying power, even when least loud, which distinguishes the great voices of the world, the half a dozen in a century that leave undying echoes behind them when they are still. His blood rushed up in his throat at the sound and almost choked him, so that he pulled at his collar with his finger, as if it were too tight.

He had not intended to try to see her again, but the fascination of the light and distant song was more than he could resist. He knocked and waited on the little steps outside the door. He was sure that he heard someone moving upstairs

and approaching a window, and he guessed that he could be seen through the slats of the blinds. A long time passed and he heard no sound. Then, as usual, the stable-man came to the door, with his faithful, stolid face. He began to give the customary answer.

"The Signorina Aliandra has gone to the country with —"

"Let me come in," said Tebaldo, interrupting the man roughly.

He was active, strong, and in a bad temper, and before the man could hinder him, Tebaldo had pushed himself into the house and was shutting the door behind him.

"And the notary is asleep," said the man, concluding the formula, in a tone of surprise and protest, but attempting no further resistance.

"Wake him, then!" cried Tebaldo, his naturally smooth voice rising to a high and almost brassy tone. "And the devil take you, your mother, and both your souls!" he added, relapsing into dialect in his anger.

He must have been heard to the top of the house, and by Gesualda in her kitchen. Immediately there came a sound of footsteps from above. But Tebaldo was already mounting the stairs. Aliandra was coming down to meet him, her face flushed with annoyance and her eyes sparkling.

"What is this, Don Tebaldo?" she asked, as

soon as she caught sight of him. "By what right do you —"

He interrupted her.

"Because I mean to see you," he answered. "When you are in the country with Gesualda visiting your friends, one ought not to hear you singing in Randazzo as one passes your house."

Aliandra was not really very angry that he should have got in, for she was beginning to find her father's company a little dull. But she made a movement of annoyance as though displeased at having betrayed herself by her singing.

"Well — go down to the sitting-room," she said. "I cannot turn you out, since you have got in."

They descended, and she sent away the stableman, and made Tebaldo go into the front room, leaving the door open, however, as she followed him. His anger disappeared when her manner changed. He took her hand and tried to make her sit down, but she smiled and shook her head.

"I cannot stay," she said. "But as for your having been kept out, that is really my father's doing. I suppose he is right, but I am glad to see you for a moment. I was afraid you had gone back to Rome."

"Not without seeing you. But what absurd idea possesses your father —"

"Hush! Not so loud! The doors are open upstairs, too, and one hears everything."

"Then I will shut the door —"

"No, no! Please do not! He would scold, for he would certainly know. Besides, you must go."

"I do not understand you at all," said Tebaldo, lowering his voice. "The last time I saw you, you were just like yourself again, and now — I do not understand. You are quite changed."

"No. I am always the same, Tebaldo." Her voice was suddenly kind. "I told you the whole truth in Rome, once for all. Why must I say it over again? Is it of any use?"

"It never was of any use to say it all," answered Tebaldo. "You do not believe that I love you —"

"You are wrong. I do believe it — as much as you do yourself!" She laughed rather irrelevantly.

"Why do you laugh?" he asked.

"Such love is a laughing matter, my dear Tebaldo. I am not a child. It is better that love should end in laughter than in tears."

"Why should it end at all?"

"Because you are engaged to marry another woman, dear friend. A very good reason — for me." She laughed again.

"You have only a dead man's word for it," said Tebaldo, grimly. "Unfortunately he is where he cannot take it back. But I can for him. It is not true."

He set his eyes, as it were, while he looked at

her, in order to make her believe that he was telling the truth. But she knew him well, for she had known him long, and she doubted him still. She shook her head.

"It may not be literally true," she said. "But practically it is the fact. You mean to marry the American. That is why neither my father nor I wish you to come to the house. You injure my reputation here, in my own town, as you do in Rome. If you loved me, you would not wish to do that. I have held my head high at the beginning, and that is the hardest. I did not mean to say it over again, but you force me to. Do you want me? Marry me. If you were a rich man, I suppose I should be ashamed to speak as I do. But we are both poor, you for a nobleman and I for an artist. So there is no question of interest, is there? I have not seen your American heiress. She may be handsomer than I, for I am not the most beautiful woman in the world. She is rich. That is her advantage. She may be a good girl, but she is no better than I, the singer, the notary's daughter, who have nothing in my whole life to blush for. Look at me, now, as I am. You know me. Choose between us, and let this end. I am willing to marry you if you want me, but I am not willing to sacrifice my good name to you, nor to any man in Europe, king, prince, or gentleman. Here I stand, and you may look at me for the last

time, compare me with your foreign young lady, and make up your mind definitely. If it is to be marriage, I will marry you at once. If not, I will not see you again, if I can possibly help it, either here or in Rome."

As she finished her long speech she crossed her arms behind her and faced him rather proudly, drawing herself up to her full height, smiling a little, but with an earnest look in her eyes. She had never looked so handsome. The few days of country life had completely rested her young face.

"You are frank, at all events," said Tebaldo, half mechanically, for he was thinking more of her than of her words.

"And it is time that you should be frank, too," she answered. "You must make your choice, and abide by it. Aliandra Basili or the American girl."

He was silent, for he was in a dilemma and was, besides, too nervous from all he had been through to like being driven to a sudden decision. On the other hand, her beauty stirred him now, as it had not done before, and the idea of giving her up was unbearable. She looked at him steadily for several seconds. More than once his lips parted, as though he were going to speak, but no words came. Gradually her mouth grew scornful and her eyes hard.

All at once she laughed a little harshly and turned towards the door.

"You have chosen," she said. "Goodbye."

But the passionate longing that had assailed him outside, in the street, at the sound of her voice, had doubled and trebled now. As she turned, the folds of her gown followed her figure in a way that drove him mad.

"Aliandra!" he cried, overtaking her in an instant, and catching her in his arms.

She struggled a little as he forced her head backwards upon his shoulder.

"You!" He kissed the word upon her lips again and again. "You! You!" he repeated. "I cannot live without you, and you know it! Yes — I will marry you — before God, I will —"

And many passionate, broken words and solemn vows mingled with his kisses as he stood there pressing her to him. It was not a noble love, but it was genuine and fierce, as all the man's passions were, whether for love, or hatred, or revenge. It was when he had let them drive him to reckless deeds that his other nature asserted itself, calm and treacherous and self-contained.

As for Aliandra herself, she had saved her self-respect, though few people might respect her for what she had done. She was not a very romantic or sentimental young woman, but according to her lights she was a good girl. She had

been taught to consider that all men were originally and derivatively bad, and that every woman had a genuine right to make the most advantageous marriage she could. She did not in the least expect that Tebaldo would be faithful to her, but she firmly intended to be an honest wife, on general principles. What she most wanted was his name, for which she meant to earn a fortune by her art. She had never been in love and, therefore, did not believe that love had any real existence, a view not uncommon with very young people who have no particular sentimentality in their composition. And so rigid were her ideas in one direction that she resented the demonstrative way in which Tebaldo expressed his decision.

He was almost beside himself, for his nerves had been already unstrung, and her beauty completely dominated him for the time being, so that he forgot even Miss Slayback's millions, his own evil deeds, and his meeting with the outlaw. There was nothing which he was not ready to do. Basili should draw up the marriage contract at once, and on the following morning they would be formally betrothed. Only the fact that he could not with propriety be married within less than three months of his brother's death recalled him to himself.

The afternoon was already advancing when he left the house and went back to the inn, half dazed

and almost forgetful alike of past and future, as he walked up the street. Before he had gone a hundred yards, however, he had regained enough composure to think of what he had to do, and when he reached the inn, no one would have supposed that anything unusual had happened to him.

As he rode out of the town, half an hour later, he vaguely wondered at himself for what he had done, and wondered, also, how he could get out of his present difficult position.

He looked at his watch, and saw that it was growing late. He had far to ride, and had intended to start much earlier in the afternoon. He had the innkeeper's best horse, but it was rather a slow animal, not to be compared with Basili's brown mare. He quickened his pace as well as he could, however, and cantered along the more level stretches of the high road. At the first opportunity he struck off into a bridle path to the right which led westward towards the heights above Maniace.

He had ridden several miles, in and out among the little undulations of the upper valley, when he came out upon a broad bit of meadow, such as one occasionally finds in that region, just beyond the black lands. He put his horse at a gallop, taking advantage of the chance to gain a little time, and riding diagonally for a point at the opposite side

from which the bridle path led up to the hills, as he well knew.

He was less than half way across the grass when he heard the heavy tread of horses galloping after him, with the clanking of arms and a sound of deep voices calling out to him. He looked round, but he knew already that he was followed by mounted carabinieri, and that they could overtake him easily enough. After a moment's hesitation he drew rein and waited quietly for the troopers to come up. He wished that he had carried his rifle across his saddle-bow instead of at his back, for he at first believed that there was some information against him from Santa Vittoria, and that they meant to arrest him. On the other hand, to have unslung his rifle, after seeing that they were carabinieri, would have been to acknowledge that he feared them. His mind worked quickly as he sat still in his saddle, waiting for them.

But when they were fifty yards away one of them spoke, and reined in his charger.

"It is Don Tebaldo Pagliuca!" he exclaimed in a tone of surprise, and in the desolate stillness of the lonely field, Tebaldo heard the words and understood that he had been mistaken for someone else.

The other trooper laughed a little, and they both trotted up to Tebaldo, saluting when they were near him.

"I beg your pardon," said the older soldier. "We took you for a stranger. It is a lonely place, and we have news that the brigands are somewhere in the neighbourhood. I trust we have not annoyed you, signore. Accept our excuses."

Tebaldo smiled easily.

"You took me for an outlaw," he said. "It is natural enough, I am sure. Do you know your way? Can I be of service to you?"

The elder trooper asked one or two questions about the directions in which the bridle paths led. He evidently knew the country tolerably well, and Tebaldo was wise enough not to deceive him. After a few moments' conversation, he offered the men a couple of cigars, which they gratefully accepted and hid in the inner pockets of their tunics, after which they saluted again and rode away in the direction whence they had come. In disturbed times such patrols are to be met with occasionally on almost every practicable bridle path, and the foot-carabineers scramble up and down through the country in pairs, even where there are no paths at all.

As he rode on alone Tebaldo was aware that his heart was beating faster than usual. He had been startled by the unexpected meeting, and for one moment had expected to be arrested. He now reflected that he had no real cause to fear any such

catastrophe, since, by this time, the Moscio had certainly recovered the knife, which represented the only possible evidence against him. But the physical impression remained, and it was very like fear. He had rarely been afraid of anything in his life, and the sensation was disturbing, for it warned him that the strain on his whole nature was beginning to weaken him.

He pressed on, urging his lazy horse whenever the ground permitted, and cutting across through the woods, from one bridle path to another, as often as he could, shortening the way to gain time. He was near the foot of the hill on which the outlaws were camping and was just about to cross the streamlet which ran down from the spring, when a man in tweed clothes, that had an English look, quietly stepped out from behind a bush and stood in his way, at the water's edge, holding a rifle in his hand. Tebaldo's horse stopped of his own accord.

"Your name, if you please," said the outlaw, civilly.

"Tebaldo Pagliuca. I come by appointment to visit one of your friends."

"Name him, if you please."

"The Moscio," said Tebaldo, knowing that if the names had not agreed with those given to the sentinel as a pass, the man would probably have killed him instantly as a spy.

"I will show you the way," said the brigand, slinging his rifle on his shoulder.

"I know the way perfectly," answered Tebaldo. "Pray do not trouble yourself."

"It is a pleasure," returned the other, and he cleared the little stream at a bound.

Tebaldo guessed that he was not altogether trusted, even now. As the man walked up the hill he whistled softly, and in a few moments, emerging from the brush into a little clearing, Tebaldo saw the Moscio waiting for him. It was dusky under the trees, but Tebaldo could see the pleasant smile on the girlish face. The Moscio had his rifle under his arm, and was smoking a cigarette. The man who had led Tebaldo to the spot disappeared into the brush, returning to his post by the stream. Tebaldo dismounted.

"Have you met anyone?" enquired the outlaw, shaking hands.

"No," answered Tebaldo, "not since I left the high road."

He had reflected that he had done unwisely in not turning back with the carabinieri and riding with them as far as the road, in order to disarm any possible suspicions, and he knew that the Moscio would think so, too. He should, if necessary, have even waited till the next day before coming up to the camp, but his anxiety to see the knife safe in the Moscio's possession had outweighed everything else.

"So much the better," answered the outlaw, unsuspiciously. "By the bye, here is your knife. Is this it?"

He held it out to Tebaldo, who took it eagerly, his fingers closing round the sheath, as though he were afraid of dropping it. He breathed hard between his teeth once or twice, as he looked at it, in sheer satisfaction.

"It is yours, I suppose?" observed the Moscio, interrogatively, for Tebaldo had forgotten to speak. "There was no other."

"Yes. I thank you. I am very grateful to you." The words were as sincere as any the man had ever uttered, and he handed the knife back.

"Not at all," answered the outlaw. "It was interesting to see the place. I am glad to have served you. Since you have taken the trouble to come so far, will you accept our hospitality this evening? You can hardly get back to Randazzo to-night. Mauro is in a very good humour this evening, and the weather is pleasant. You will not suffer much inconvenience. The huts are quite dry. We will try and make you some return for your former hospitality."

Tebaldo accepted readily enough, and they began to ascend the hill at once. It was some distance to the top. The Moscio turned to the right at a big, old chestnut tree.

"That is not the best way," remarked Tebaldo.

"Keep on another ten yards and then turn to the left. There is an old bridle path on the other side of the hawthorn bushes."

The Moscio laughed softly.

"It is a pity that you are not with us," he said. "You know the paths better than we do."

"I was born near here," answered Tebaldo. "I have known these woods since I was a boy."

"I wish I had! I sometimes lose my way in this part of Sicily."

The path began exactly where Tebaldo had said that it did, the entrance being hidden by hawthorn and blackberry bushes. He went on a few steps, doubled behind the brambles, and led the Moscio along a much better way than the outlaws had discovered for themselves. The outlaw appreciated the advantage, and reflected that Tebaldo could help the band in a thousand ways if he chose. Without passing by the spring, they suddenly found themselves at the top of the hill. The path stopped abruptly against the back of one of the wooden huts, having formerly crossed the summit at this point.

"Let me go first," said the Moscio, and he passed Tebaldo and his horse and went round the corner of what was really little more than a shed, roughly enclosed with half-rotten planks.

Various exclamations of surprise greeted their appearance from an unexpected quarter.

"Our friend, Don Tebaldo Pagliuca," said the Moscio, addressing a number of men who were sitting and lying about on the dry ground. "He knows the woods better than we, and has shown me a new path from the big chestnut tree."

"He is welcome," said Mauro, in a dull and muffled voice, but with some cordiality.

He and most of the others rose and greeted Tebaldo warmly. Some had known him already, and almost all had known Ferdinando well.

They were a strange looking set of men. Most of them were well dressed, and so far as their clothes were concerned might have been taken for a party of southern country gentlemen and rich young farmers, camping during a day's shooting. Mauro, who was by far the oldest, might have been seven or eight and thirty years of age, but not more, and most of the others were evidently under thirty. They were all strong looking, with the toughened appearance of men accustomed to live in the open air and to take exertion as a matter of course. The Moscio alone had preserved his marvellous, child-like freshness of complexion. The 'Moscio' means the 'soft,' being similar to our English word 'mush,' and the youth's looks accounted for the name, while his remarkable strength and utter fearlessness contrasted rather comically with the epithet.

The peculiarities in the appearance of his com-

panions were chiefly in their faces and expressions. Most of them had the oddly sinister, unchanging smile with something contemptuous in it which so often characterizes adventurers, both within the pale of society and beyond its bounds. Such men do not laugh easily. In their eyes, too, there was the look one sees in those of some Red Indians and of dangerous wild animals aware of pursuit and always inclined to turn at bay rather than escape. Tebaldo felt, rather than saw, the glances that were turned upon him as he stood in their midst, still holding his horse by the bridle.

Mauro himself was dark, clean shaven, close cropped, and already bald on the top of his head. He had often disguised himself successfully as a priest, for he had been educated in a seminary, had turned atheist, had been a journalist, and had finally got into trouble by shooting his editor in consequence of a quarrel which had apparently begun about a question of grammar, but had in reality been connected with politics, so that the deed had been regarded as an act of justice and patriotism by the mafia. There had been a reward of twenty thousand francs on Mauro's head, dead or alive, for several years, and photographs of the famous brigand were sold everywhere in Palermo, Messina, and Catania, but there was not a carabinieri in the island who could boast of having seen the man himself. He was taciturn and reti-

cent, too, though he could be fluent enough when he pleased ; and although he put a gold piece into his purse for everyone he killed, as the Moscio had said, he could never be induced to tell how many there were in the little leathern bag. He never did anything unnecessarily; but was capable of the most blood-curdling cruelty when any end was to be gained, and was merciless to informers when they fell into his hands, not exactly out of a love for inflicting pain, but in order to inspire a salutary terror. He was extremely temperate in his habits and simple in his clothes, though his weapons were always of the best and of the newest device, and he had a large account with the leading bank of Palermo. He intended to emigrate, he said, when he should be rich enough, but those who knew him did not believe that he could be satisfied to settle down as a well-to-do proprietor in the Argentine Republic. The Moscio always said that Mauro would yet repent of his ways, enter a monastery, mortify the flesh, and die in the odour of sanctity. Whereat Mauro generally nodded thoughtfully, as though he himself regarded such a termination to his career as quite within the bounds of possibility.

As for the rest of the band, none of them were in any way so remarkable as their leader. The man known as Leoncino was believed to be a son of the famous Leone, and boasted of it. He had

stabbed a rival in a village love affair, after having been brought up rather mysteriously in the house of a rich farmer. Schiantaceci was undoubtedly a gentleman by birth, a sad young fellow, with a drooping brown moustache, fiery eyes, and a very sweet voice in which he often sang softly on a summer's evening when it was not dangerous to make a noise in the camp. No one knew his real name. In a fight he always behaved as though he wished to be killed, which is generally the surest way of killing others.

Among the rest there were men of all classes. There was a man who had been mayor of his village, there was a butcher, there were three or four deserters from the army, who had each killed a comrade, and one who had attacked his lieutenant but had not killed him. There was a chemist's apprentice who had poisoned his master, and an actor who had strangled his manager's wife in a love quarrel. There were also two anarchists who had escaped imprisonment under Crispi's rule. But there was not one in the number who had done less than two murders at the time when Tebaldo went up to the camp.

One of the outlaws led his horse away, and he sat down by Mauro a little apart from the rest. In the middle of the open space a fire was burning down to a bed of coals. It had been very carefully built and slowly fed so as to produce the

smallest possible amount of smoke. A well-cleaned gridiron was stuck upright in the earth by the handle, and at the entrance to one of the huts the man who was a butcher was cutting a huge piece of fresh meat into steaks.

After the first greetings, the men relapsed into silence, and paid little attention to Tebaldo. Mauro talked with him in low tones. The chief seemed, indeed, unable to speak loud. He asked many questions about the Saracinesca, but he would have considered it a breach of civility to refer to the truth about Francesco's death.

"These Saracinesca are naturally antipathetic to you," he observed, "and I daresay you would not be sorry if one of them put his ears in pawn at my bank."

"They are a powerful family," answered Tebaldo, cautiously. "If one of them were taken by you, there would be reinforcements of carabinieri throughout Sicily."

"These carabinieri are much like flies," said Mauro, thoughtfully. "They come in swarms, they buzz, and they fly away again, leaving nobody much the worse. It means a little more caution for a month or two. That is all. But the Saracinesca would pay a good sum to keep the young heir's nose on his face, and San Giacinto would probably write a cheque at my dictation before he were half roasted."

He spoke quietly and in a reflective tone.

"For my part," replied Tebaldo, "I wish them no good, as you may imagine. But the younger Saracinesca is in Rome. San Giacinto came back last night, it is true, but he is safe at Camaldoli."

"Safe is a relative term when we are in the neighbourhood," remarked Mauro. "Especially if you will give us your assistance," he added. "On the whole, it would be more convenient to take San Giacinto. He could write the cheque, and I could cash it almost before there were any alarm, holding him until we got the money. If we took the young one, we should have to communicate with the family. That is always disagreeable."

"You might have difficulty in cashing the cheque," suggested Tebaldo.

"None whatever," replied Mauro. "You are quite mistaken. That is always easy, though of course money in cash is preferable. A cash transaction is always better, as a mere matter of business."

Tebaldo had not by any means anticipated that he was to be called in as an ally in such an affair, and did not like the prospect at all. He promised himself that he would return to Rome as soon as possible. For the present he put aside the extremely complicated position in which he was placed by having given two promises of marriage. He felt uncomfortable, too, and chilly. He shiv-

ered a little, and Mauro noticed it, and called for a cup of wine. Tebaldo swallowed it eagerly and felt better.

"It will be necessary for you to help us," said Mauro, presently, and in a tone of quiet decision. "No one knows the land about Camaldoli as well as you do, and the approaches to the house."

"I would rather not be involved in the capture," answered Tebaldo.

"I am sure you will not refuse," replied Mauro, smiling at him. "It will be a little return for the service the Moscio has done you. He was very glad to help you, of course, but you must not forget that you are one of us, now, and that we always help each other when we can. I am sure you will not refuse."

Tebaldo glanced sideways at the quiet, priest-faced man who had been the terror of Sicily for years. He realized that the outlaw had spoken the truth, and that he might at any moment have to turn outlaw himself, if the secret of the knife were known. He knew the brigands and their ways. They would keep faith with him, even at the risk of their own lives, but he must submit to their conditions. They had him in their power, and he must help them if they required him to do so. If he refused, information would be in the hands of the carabinieri in twelve hours, which would drive him into outlawry, if he escaped at

all. But if he helped them, they would stand by him. He had not foreseen such a situation.

"What is it that you wish me to do?" he enquired after a short pause.

"I will tell you," answered Mauro. "There are now only four carabinieri quartered at Camaldoli, and as they ride on patrol duty like the rest, there are never more than two in the house at a time. There is San Giacinto himself, so that there are three men to deal with. The rest of the people are Sicilians, and will give no trouble."

"San Giacinto is equal to two or three ordinary men," observed Tebaldo.

"Is he?" Mauro spoke indifferently. "One man is very like another, at the end of a rifle barrel," he continued, "and if one pulls the trigger, they are all exactly alike. The point is this. We intend to surprise Camaldoli to-morrow night. You must lead us by the ways you know to the low rampart at the back, behind the stables and over the river. There is a way up on that side, but we do not know it. We shall find a ladder resting against the wall on that side. A friend will place it there."

"Why do you not get him to show you the way?" asked Tebaldo.

"He lives in the house," answered Mauro. "The gates are shut at Ave Maria, and there is a roll-call of the servants and men. San Giacinto, or whichever of the Saracinesca is there, locks the

gate himself and keeps the keys in his own room. They all go to bed early, and the house is always quiet between midnight and two o'clock. There is no moon just now, and if we can get round to the back without rousing the dogs, or attracting attention in any way, we can get possession of the place in five minutes. The carabineers sleep in a room on the court. They have to sleep sometimes, like other people. Barefooted we shall make no noise on the stones. Leave the rest to us."

"And have they no sentinels at night?" enquired Tebaldo. "Do they keep no watch?"

"No. The house would be hard to enter without a ladder at the one weak point. One would be sure to rouse everybody before one got in. But once in the court, we can silence the two carabineers in a moment, and then we shall be fifteen to one against San Giacinto. I would not give much for his safety, then. The main thing is to reach the ladder quietly and all together. The paths are difficult, there is water in the stream still, and we must know where to ford it in the dark, for we could not safely approach from the other side. Your help is absolutely necessary to this enterprise. As I said, I am quite sure that you will give it—quite sure."

He emphasized the last words a little, and Tebaldo knew what he meant. There was no choice.

"I will do as you wish," he said reluctantly. "I will come here before sunset, and when it is time I will lead you by the shortest way."

The Moscio's eyes were watching him and met his own as he looked up.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE two carabineers who had met Tebaldo in the field had treated him with the greatest civility, but when he was out of hearing they discussed the rather singular meeting. The more they thought of it, the more strange it seemed to them that he should have been riding alone, without so much as a portmanteau, by way of luggage, towards the Maniace woods, and at such an hour. It must be remembered that before Francesco's death, and since Ferdinando's, the authorities had everywhere been warned against the Corleone family, in the expectation of some outrage against the Saracinesca or their property; and the impression was universal that Ippolito had not killed Francesco, while many who had known the brothers since they had been wild boys at Camaldoli believed that Tebaldo had done the deed, or that he had caused it to be done, and had cleverly managed to throw the guilt upon the priest. The carabineers quartered in the neighbourhood all believed this and scouted Tebaldo's story of a race. They had no more opinion of the law's wisdom than the outlaws

whom they were continually hunting, for their experience had shown them how easily the law could be defeated in a country where the whole population was banded together to defy it.

The troopers discussed the question as they rode down to Randazzo. They had seen nothing else worth mentioning, on their patrol, and when they reported themselves to the sergeant at quarters, they told him exactly what had passed. The sergeant was the one who had at first accompanied the Saracinesca to Camaldoli. He dismissed the troopers to their supper, thought the matter over, and went to the inn to find the lieutenant. The latter was playing dominos, as usual, with the deputy prefect, before going home to supper.

He was a grey-haired man of forty, prematurely aged by hard service and constant anxiety, a tall, spare figure, the perfection of military neatness in his dress, with a grave manner and a rare but kindly smile. For the rest, he was brave, honourable, and energetic, and, like the men under him, he was not much inclined to believe in the law on its own recommendation. He was as firmly persuaded as they that Tebaldo was a bad character, and had quietly watched him on the several occasions on which he had lately appeared at the inn.

He went outside with the sergeant and listened to his story attentively.

"The brigands are in the Maniace woods," he

said at last. "They left Noto some days ago. But one might as well try to find pins in a ploughed field, on a dark night. It would take at least five hundred men to beat the woods through and surround the fellows."

"A thousand, sir," suggested the sergeant, by way of comment. "It took a regiment to catch Leone alone, in the old days."

The lieutenant broke off the end of a black cigar thoughtfully, but seemed to forget to light it, becoming suddenly absorbed in his own reflexions. The sergeant stood patiently at attention.

"Have we any information this evening?" asked the officer, suddenly, as though he were looking for something.

"No, sir."

"Any arrests to-day? Any suspicious characters?"

"No, sir."

The lieutenant seemed dissatisfied, and looked a long time at his unlighted, black cigar, in deep thought.

"Very well. Good night, sergeant." He nodded and turned away, but looked round before he had made two steps. "Have two men ready all night, in case I should need them," he added.

"Yes, sir." The sergeant saluted again, and went back to his quarters.

The officer returned to his game of dominos.

He made one or two moves and then called the servant.

"Don Tebaldo Pagliuca is staying in the house, is he not?" he enquired. "Present my compliments and ask if he will not come down and play a game."

"The signore is out, Signor Lieutenant," answered the servant.

"Indeed? I am sorry. I suppose he is strolling in the town. It is cooler in the streets."

"I do not know," the man replied, though he knew very well that Tebaldo had the innkeeper's horse.

The officer nodded, as though satisfied, and went on with his game. The deputy prefect looked at him enquiringly, but he vouchsafed no information. The official representative of the government was a rather foolish man, very much afraid of the Sicilians and of doing anything to attract the ill-will of the mafia.

The lieutenant sat over the game later than usual. The windows of the public room, which was at once the dining-room and the café of the clean little inn, looked upon the main street and were open, for the air was hot. It would have been impossible not to hear Tebaldo's horse if he came back. But he had not come when the officer went home. The latter's own lodging was also on the main street, towards the upper gate, and Tebaldo

would have to pass it to reach the inn. The lieutenant sat up very late, but still Tebaldo did not come.

"They have either taken him," reasoned the officer, "and in that case he will not come back at all. Or else he is on good terms with them and is spending the night with them, and will return in the morning."

But at seven o'clock in the morning, being about to show himself at his window, the lieutenant heard the tread of a shod saddle horse in the street. It was Tebaldo, looking pale and weary, leaning a little forward and dangling his feet out of the stirrups, as though he had ridden far and wished to rest himself. He had the unmistakable look of a man who has worn his clothes twenty-four hours, and the soldier's sharp eyes, looking after him when he had passed the window, saw little bits of bramble and leaf clinging to his coat.

The lieutenant shaved himself carefully and thoughtfully and dressed with his usual scrupulous care. When he had buckled on his heavy cavalry sabre, he opened a drawer in an old Sicilian cabinet and took out two little Derringer pistols, examined them to see that they were properly loaded, and slipped one into each pocket of his trousers. The tight swallow-tailed tunic of his uniform made it impossible to carry a revolver concealed. He might

be going to risk his life as well as his reputation on that morning.

When he left his lodging, he went first to the quarters of the carabinieri and gave the sergeant an order. Then he went straight to the inn, and asked to be shown to Tebaldo Pagliuca's room. An hour had passed since the latter had come back. The servant looked up in surprise, for though the officer and Tebaldo were on terms of civility, the man knew that they were not well acquainted. He had to obey, however, and led the way up one flight of stairs, and knocked at a door on the landing.

"Come in," answered Tebaldo's voice, indifferently, for he supposed it was the servant.

The officer entered at once, taking off his cap.

"Good morning, Don Tebaldo," he said courteously, before the other could speak. "Pray forgive my intrusion, but could you lend me your revolver for a few hours? I suppose you have one? My only one is out of order, and I prefer to carry one for what I have to do. I should be extremely obliged."

"Certainly," answered Tebaldo, rather coldly, but a good deal surprised by the request.

He crossed the room and took the weapon from a table, with its leathern case.

"I should be glad if you could return it by two o'clock," he said, "as I am going away."

"Certainly," replied the officer, quietly taking the revolver out of its case. "It is loaded, I see. Thank you. Now Don Tebaldo, will you kindly sit down for a few moments? I wish to speak to you."

He held the revolver in his right hand, and his quiet grey eyes looked gravely at the man he had caught. Tebaldo started at the sudden change of tone, and faced him, in renewed surprise.

"I borrowed your revolver in order to speak with you," said the lieutenant, "for I have heard that you have a sudden and violent temper. But I wish to speak in a quiet and friendly way. Shall we sit down?" He took a chair with his left hand.

"I am at a loss to understand you," answered Tebaldo, with rising anger. "What do you want?"

"I will explain. I am aware that you have spent the night with the brigands, who are friends of yours. You will either lead me to them, or you will go to prison. I have a couple of men downstairs, waiting. Now choose."

"This is outrageous!" Tebaldo's voice rang high, as he sprang forward.

But the sight of the revolver's muzzle close to his face stopped him, though his eyes blazed with fury.

"It is of no use to be angry," said the officer, who was perfectly cool. "Choose, if you please."

"It is outrageous! You cannot prove anything against me!"

"You are mistaken," answered the other, boldly. "I can prove many things."

"What? What can you prove?"

"I do not intend to provide you with the means of defending your case by telling you what I know. But I give you your choice. I have full power to do so. Lead me and my men to a place where we can catch Mauro, and I give you my word of honour that no accusation shall be brought against you. Refuse to do so, and I give you my word that you will be handcuffed in five minutes and taken to Messina this afternoon. You know, of course, that complicity with a band of outlaws entails penal servitude."

He saw plainly enough that he had not risked his reputation for nothing. Tebaldo was brave still, though he was unstrung and broken, but his face now showed the perplexity he could only feel if he were really in the situation the officer had prepared for him.

"I deny the whole charge," he said, after a moment's thought. "This is an outrage for which you will have to answer. Be good enough to stop threatening me, and leave my room."

The lieutenant drew a nickel whistle from the bosom of his tunic with his left hand.

"If I whistle for my troopers," he said, "you

will be in handcuffs in five minutes. I will count twenty while you make your choice. One, two, three —" and he continued to count.

Tebaldo grew pale by quick degrees, as he listened, and his heart beat violently with excitement. The officer reached twenty in his counting, and raised the big whistle to his lips.

"Stop!" exclaimed Tebaldo, hardly able to speak.

"Well?" asked the officer, holding the whistle ready near his mouth.

"You give me your word of honour that no accusation whatever shall be brought against me?"

"None on the ground of complicity with the brigands," answered the lieutenant. "I give you my word as an officer."

"There is no other to bring." Tebaldo was white.

"None that concerns me," replied the other, coolly. "There is a good deal of diversity of opinion about your brother's death, as you must know."

"This is an insult —"

"Oh, no! I do not accuse you at all. I only wish to limit my own promise to the matter in hand. I have done so, and I understand that you agree, do you not?"

"By force, for I suppose I must," replied

Tebaldo, in a sullen tone. "You must further engage to protect me from the mafia, when you have caught the fellows," he added.

"You shall have an escort wherever you go and as long as you please to remain in the country."

"That will not be long," said Tebaldo, almost to himself.

"So much the better. And now, if you please, at what time shall we start this evening?"

Tebaldo inwardly cursed himself for having trusted the Moscio in the first instance, but he quickly reflected that he might still improve his position in the eyes of the officer and thereby, perhaps, have less to fear in the future.

"Look here, lieutenant," he said, changing his tone and sitting down. "I have been forced into this, from first to last. I was riding by myself yesterday afternoon, in the country I know so well, and I had not the slightest idea that the outlaws were in the neighbourhood. I met a couple of your men, who at first took me for one of the brigands myself, and then recognized me and apologized, telling me that the band was in the neighbourhood. They rode off, and I took a short cut through the woods. I came upon the encampment unexpectedly."

The officer listened attentively and gravely. Tebaldo proceeded.

"In former years, even a year ago, when we

lived at Camaldoli before selling the place, we were obliged, as a matter of personal safety, to put up with a great deal from these men, and if we had informed against them, we should have been murdered. That is how it happened that my brother Ferdinando knew some of them. You know the conditions of the country as well as I do."

"I wish I did!" exclaimed the soldier, devoutly.

"You know them well enough, at all events. Poor gentlefolk, as we were then, cannot always help themselves. Yesterday afternoon I found myself suddenly surrounded by the whole band. There are fifteen of them. One of them recognized me, and a long discussion began. They wish to get into Camaldoli to-night and carry off the Marchese di San Giacinto."

"Fifteen armed men might do it," observed the officer. "There are only two troopers there at night."

"Yes. But the brigands do not know the way to the weak point at the back. I will explain."

Tebaldo told the whole truth now, for he saw that his best chance of safety lay in that direction. Then he proceeded to exculpate himself.

"They also gave me my choice, something in your manner," he went on. "They offered, by way of alternative, to roast me alive, if I refused to show them the way to-night, and they assured

me of what I knew perfectly well, namely, that if I did not keep the appointment they could murder me wherever I might be. This was because I insisted on coming here again before to-night. It was not easy, but they yielded at last. However, it was very late by the time we had come to an agreement, and I could not have got back to Randazzo, for there was no moon, and the woods are dark and full of pitfalls. I got back this morning, and intended to go down to Messina and catch the train at Reggio to-night, and take my chance of safety in Rome. They never could get up to the back of Camaldoli without me. There you have the whole story in a nutshell."

"I see," answered the officer, who only believed half of the plausible story. "You were in a most difficult position. But it is now in your power to do the country a great service. All that is necessary is that you should lead the band to the foot of the wall, as you promised. I will take care of the rest. In the woods it is impossible to catch them. But it is important that we should recognize you, in order not to kill you by mistake if there is any fighting, as there probably will be, though I hope to take most of them alive. The wisest thing would be that you should be the first to mount the ladder, by agreement, on the ground that you can lead them inside, whereas they might lose their way."

"Yes — that is best. It is a very complicated place, like a labyrinth, between the rampart and the court."

"You will pardon me for reverting to the conditions," said the lieutenant, suavely. "You realize, of course, that in case you should not wish to carry out your part of them, you are always in the power of the law, unless you turn outlaw yourself, which, in your position, you would hardly like to do."

"I understand my position perfectly," answered Tebaldo, coldly. "I shall lead the band to the foot of the ladder at about one o'clock, I fancy."

"Thank you," said the officer. "I am much obliged for the loan of your revolver, which I return to you, as you may need it this evening."

He laid it on the table, bowed civilly, and went out, leaving the betrayer to his own reflexions.

CHAPTER XXXVI

TEBALDO would have given half his life and all his soul to undo the work of the past twenty-four hours. But it was now absolutely impossible for him to draw back. His only chance of future safety lay in serving the government, though he did not like to think what his fate might be if he should fall into the hands of any friend of the outlaws after betraying them. Yet, short of joining them outright, he could not possibly escape arrest if he did not carry out the conditions of his agreement with the lieutenant; and, if once arrested, the latter would only need to tell exactly what had happened in order to convict him of complicity with brigands and send him to penal servitude. He was literally caught in a vise and could not move without ruining himself.

It was early in the afternoon when he set out to ride to the Maniace woods again. In spite of everything, he had been to Basili's house and had seen Aliandra again. Though what he was going to do was not noble, it was dangerous, and the sight of the woman he loved cheered him in his

need. He looked ill, and said that he had a touch of the fever, and Aliandra believed him, and was very kind and gentle with him. He was really too naturally courageous, with all his hideous faults, not to enjoy the passing moment to the full. His marriage with Miss Slayback looked less and less possible, as Aliandra's influence gained the ascendant, and he formally bound himself to marry the Sicilian girl.

It was like a pleasant dream between two spells of torture, and as he rode up towards the woods it faded again into an improbability, and the ugly present truth rose in its place. Even to him, the idea of such a deliberate betrayal as he contemplated was revolting. He was far too much a Sicilian to think otherwise. Apart from any apprehension for his own subsequent safety, he honestly detested the thought of leading men who trusted him to certain destruction, no matter how bad they might be. Even the fact that they had forced him to be their guide, against his will, had little weight. He knew instinctively that if there were any worldly honour concerned in so dishonourable a matter, it should have bidden him either refuse to serve the law and let the law do its worst against him, or turn outlaw and warn the band that they were in danger. Ten days earlier he might have had the boldness to do either the one or the other, but he lacked it now. His charac-

ter was momentarily and perhaps permanently broken, and though he still had the physical courage to face violent danger, he grasped at any means of returning to a peaceful existence, like the veriest coward.

All through the long ride in the desolate lands and the lonely forest, and throughout the evening that followed, his mind laboured painfully against the secret and overwhelming shame of what he meant to do, and as he sat resting among the outlaws he hardly spoke, except in answer to a question from Mauro or the Moscio, and made a bare pretence of eating a little for the sake of appearances. Again and again he felt impelled to open his lips and warn his companions of their danger, and once his resolution almost broke down. But as he glanced at Mauro's quietly superior smile, a sort of sullen resentment got hold of him against the man who had forced him into his present position, and he held his peace. Once or twice he thought of the knife which the Moscio had in his pocket, but he knew that a brigand's evidence would be worth nothing in law, and would be regarded as a mere attempt at vengeance for having been betrayed. It had been very different so long as the knife had lain under the altar, where anyone might find it. There were hundreds of knives like this one in Italy, and there could be nothing surprising in the fact that one belonging

to a brigand should be rusty with blood. The bare assertion of the Moscio would not be worth much.

It was Mauro's intention to kill the carabinieri in their sleep, if possible, to bind and gag San Giacinto and get him out through the postern gate, and to bind in the same way all the Sicilian servants in the house, so that they could neither free themselves nor make a noise. They would themselves prefer this, and would submit patiently, as they generally did in such affairs, because if they were not made fast they would afterwards be blamed for not immediately giving an alarm, whereas if they roused the village they would expose themselves to Mauro's vengeance as informers. It must be admitted that the position of the servants was not precisely enviable.

The postern of Camaldoli would then be locked again by means of the keys found in San Giacinto's room, and the keys would be thrown into the river. San Giacinto, bound on a horse, would be conveyed to a safe hiding-place before morning, and all would be over. The brigands would be many miles away by that time, scattering over the country as they usually did, while three or four of the strongest and most desperate remained with Mauro to guard San Giacinto until he should see fit to ransom himself by writing a cheque. It was all very well planned. Tebaldo was instructed to

disappear from the scene as soon as he had led the band to the foot of the wall.

"I had better go up the ladder first," he suggested. "You will lose your way in the narrow passages between the rampart and the stables. The place is like a labyrinth on that side."

"Of course," said Mauro, "if you will help us further, we shall be greatly obliged, but that was not in the agreement, so I did not venture to hope—" He stopped, smiling politely.

"It will be better that I lead you into the court," answered Tebaldo. "If the carabineers are lodged there, as you say, they can only be in one room, for there is only one that would be at all suitable. It has a very small window, and in this weather they will leave the door open for coolness."

The night was clear, but there was no moon. Under the trees it was very dark, but the starlight made each opening and clearing faintly visible ahead, between the stems, as Tebaldo led the way down the hill, with the unerring certainty of a true path-finder. Again and again Mauro, who followed him closely, thought that he was taking a wrong turning, but Tebaldo never made a mistake as he swiftly and surely walked along, giving warning of any slight obstacle in a low monotonous voice, and now and then turning his head a little to listen for those behind.

They led six horses among them, Tebaldo's and five others, of which one was for San Giacinto, one for Mauro himself, and three others for the Moscio, Leoncino, and Schiantaceci. The remaining outlaws were to return at once to the huts in the woods and get their horses there.

It was characteristic of Mauro and his companions that they trusted Tebaldo's knowledge of the country, and followed him blindly after he had left the paths familiar to them. In and out he led them, always as far as possible under cover of trees and bushes, now and then over a stretch of dewy grass, then down into a little ravine, across a fork of a rough road, through more than one rivulet, ankle deep, and always by a way which the horses could safely follow, since that was essential.

At last he halted and looked at his watch by the starlight, for he had good eyes.

"It is a little early," he said to Mauro, in a whisper. "We are near. You can hear the water at the rapids where we must ford the river. It is not midnight yet, and we can reach the rampart in a quarter of an hour. Are you going to leave anyone with the horses? This would be the best place, for there are few trees between this and the water."

He felt cold. His feet were wet, and a cool night breeze blew down the valley. He turned up the collar of his coat and shivered audibly.

Mauro offered him a silver flask, and he swallowed a few drops of liquor.

"We will do as you think best," said the chief. "If you think this is a good place, we will tether the horses here, and give them their nosebags to keep them quiet."

In a few minutes the horses were tied up to separate trees by their halters, each out of reach of the other, and each had his nose in a small bag of corn. One had been brought especially for Tebaldo's, as the precaution was an important one to hinder any of the animals from neighing.

"We may as well go on," said Mauro. "They have been in bed an hour by this time, and a man in his first sleep is not so easily waked."

Tebaldo's heart was beating hard as he once more led the way. It had troubled him often of late. He felt ill, too, and his bones ached. But he did not stumble nor hesitate, as he led the fifteen men down to the ford. He shivered again as he glanced at the grey, rushing water that sparkled here and there in the starlight, at the eddies.

Mauro was already taking off his boots, and all the rest silently followed his example. On the other side of the rapids the brambles grew low down to the water's edge, and the tall eucalyptus trees made black shadows. Higher up, wild olive trees and wild figs grew out of the tangled mass of vegetation that covered the fifty or sixty feet of

the precipitous ascent, all indistinguishable in the dim light. High above all, to the right, the outline of the gloomy Druse's tower was sharp and dark against the sky, and the straight line of the rampart was drawn like a black band over the more uncertain shadows below.

Tebaldo whispered to Mauro to follow him carefully through the water, and the whispered word went back from mouth to mouth along the line till it reached the Moscio, who brought up the rear.

From step to step, knee deep in the cold stream, Tebaldo felt for his footing in the familiar ford. He had known every inch of it since he had been a child, but the freshets often changed the bed, bringing great stones down in the winter rains, which sometimes lodged on the solid rock that came to the surface at that point and produced the ford. And Tebaldo felt his way cautiously with his bare feet.

Reaching the other side, he followed the edge of the water down stream for a little way, till all the men had got out of the water and were following him, barefooted, over the stones.

Then he touched Mauro to warn him that the ascent was about to begin, and each man touched the other in warning, from first to last. With their rifles on their backs and their revolvers slung in front to be ready, the fifteen men followed their guide slowly and silently upwards. Here and

there the rock jutted out among the bushes, affording a firm foothold to naked feet and hands. Again, they had to climb up by the gnarled roots of a twisted fig tree, each man trying the wood with his hands before trusting to it. Even if a bough or dry stick had cracked, the sound could not have been heard above the steadily monotonous roar of the stream below. They moved like mountaineers, without haste, but without a pause.

The rampart was not more than twenty feet high above the final ledge, a rough wall of hewn stones, pierced all along the top by little slits for defence from the gallery inside. Tebaldo glanced to the right and left, and saw the ladder in its place. It was one of those very long ones used by the peasants for gathering olives, made of two light and half-trimmed poles, sharpened at the lower ends to stick into the moist ground and thus obtain a hold from below without throwing too much weight on the branches above, and with rungs nearly two feet apart.

Tebaldo went to the foot of the ladder and listened, though the river would have prevented him from hearing any but a very loud sound from within. His heart beat in his ears like a strong muffled drum. Mauro was close behind him, and touched him on the shoulder and pointed upwards to hasten his movements. But he felt as though he were paralyzed.

Mauro was impatient to get to work, and pushed him quietly aside. It was so dark that those behind could not see what happened. Mauro stepped upon the ladder first, the next man pressed after him, and the rest followed his companions, while Tebaldo stood in the shadow, dazed and shaking with excitement. But as the last man silently ascended, his wits returned, and he thought of his own safety. Peering up at the sky, he saw the man's dark figure disappear over the top of the wall.

With one strong effort he loosened the ladder, and in an instant sent it flying down, end foremost, through the bushes. Three steps he took under the shadow of the wall, and he plunged desperately down through the tangle, escaping for his life. He was swinging himself from a crooked root to a rock when an unearthly scream pierced the darkness, so loud and terrible that it might have been uttered close to his ear. He dropped ten feet in the dark, and before he touched the ground; even while he was still in mid-air, the quick fire of repeating rifles half deafened him. He rolled down, scrambled to his feet, jumped again, caught the bough of a tree, and swung himself out over the water, and still the rifle-shots cracked through the roar of the river. He plunged on, for he was below the ford, almost sank, found bottom, saved himself, and fled like a grey wolf in the starlight,

right across the open, barefooted as he was. The firing had not ceased when he was in the saddle, on Mauro's horse, galloping madly along the broken ground up the valley, towards the high road to Santa Vittoria. Still he heard shots, and glancing back he saw the dim flash of the next, above the wall. Then he rode for his life, standing with his bare feet in the stirrups, his heart beating with the furious gallop, and terror behind him,—the terror he had never felt before, and which even now was not common bodily fear.

He had given way at the last to a horror of shame at the thought of leading those men to destruction, to pass unhurt himself through the waiting soldiers, to be face to face with the officer who had cowed him into such a betrayal, to meet San Giacinto's gloomy scorn, to be thanked by him with the contempt he deserved, for having served the law he had so often defied. He rode for his life from the thing he had done, rather than from the fear of any pursuit.

The fight had been short and deadly. Mauro had reached the top and had dropped to the pavement of the gallery within the rampart. It was deserted, and all was quite still. He counted his men, till he saw the head of the last appearing at the top of the ladder. Then with his rifle slung ready, with his knife in his right hand and his revolver in his left, he crept noiselessly along the

stones to the entrance of a passage leading inwards. It was quite light in the starlight by comparison with the darkness in the tangle under the trees. He went on a few paces ahead of his men and turned again. Suddenly there was a tall man in front of him, who whispered as he came up.

“Are they come? Pass me, and you are safe!”

That was all, for he had been taken for Tebaldo in the gloom. In a flash he understood, and with a single movement drove his knife straight to the man’s heart. The trooper groaned as he died. Then, in a moment, the passage was full of soldiers, before, behind, everywhere. Mauro yelled to his men to escape, his muffled voice breaking into the wild scream Tebaldo had heard. At the same moment he fired.

The men saw each other in the flashes of their rifles, till the flashes only lighted up thick clouds of smoke and they groped their way to kill each other. For the outlaws died hard, and their aim was cool and true when they could see, and when they could not, they felt for flesh with the muzzles of their Winchesters and fired when they struck anything soft, alive or dead. But they knew each other by their chief’s name.

“Mauro, Mauro!” they repeated, as they jostled each other in the smoke.

But Mauro was dead in the dark already with a dozen bullets in him, and though five soldiers of

the line lay in a heap around him and under him, the gold pieces that should have counted them were never to be slipped into the little soft leathern bag.

Still a few shots were fired, here and there, for some of the men had managed to get upon the roof of the low buildings between the stables and the rampart, and the more active of the soldiers pursued them. When all was quiet save the sound of many distant voices, and only now and then an awful groan came up out of the thick smoke, one man, who had thrown away his empty rifle and pistol, felt his way among the dead, with a knife in his hand, groping before him with the other for any living thing that might come in his way. But by some miracle he crept on and found no one, and was suddenly at the rampart and alone. He glanced quickly to right and left for the ladder, and saw that it was gone.

"Judas Iscariot!" he said in a low voice, as he thought of Tebaldo.

Then, leaving his tale of dead behind him, he unhesitatingly got over the wall, turned his face to it, and let himself down, feeling for crevices in the stones with his naked feet. And his small, strong fingers found impossibly small holding, but it sufficed for a while, and when he could hold no more, he pushed himself backwards with a little spring and dropped ten feet to the ledge.

No one had fought more desperately for himself and his comrades than the Moscio, but fate had saved him once more, and he made his way quickly down to the stream, forded it almost without wetting himself, coolly found his boots among the many that waited for those who should never need them again, shod himself, picked out his own horse, and rode away towards the Maniace woods. He had found time to notice that Mauro's horse was gone, and he knew that Tebaldo had taken it because it was the best.

"Judas Iscariot!" he repeated quietly, as he rode away, without a scratch, from that hideous carnage, man enough to wish, perhaps, that he had found his death where so many had fallen.

For it had been a terrible fight, at close quarters. Since the famous Leone had been killed, there had been no such bloody encounter between outlaws and troops. The trap had been well laid, but even the brave old officer of carabinieri had not counted on having to deal with such desperate men.

Of the outlaws, five only were alive and all more or less badly wounded. The Moscio had got away unhurt, and nine were stone dead. There had been no chance of even offering quarter, for they had fired instantly as soon as they had seen themselves surrounded, and their Winchesters had done fearful work in a few moments. Four carabinieri and seventeen of the line were carried out into the

court, one by one, and were laid side by side on the stones, under the stars. A dozen or fifteen more were wounded, among whom were both the officer of the carabinieri and the young red-haired lieutenant of foot. As for San Giacinto, a bullet had taken off the top of his ear and had just scored the grey hair above it. A thin line of blood ran down the side of his dark face as he bent to examine Mauro's body, with a lantern in his hand.

Something told him that the priest-faced man had been the famous chief, and one of the surviving outlaws confirmed the fact, being brought up handcuffed to recognize the dead men one by one.

San Giacinto coldly wished that he might find Tebaldo Pagliuca among the slain, and said so.

"Never fear," said the wounded outlaw, with an ugly smile. "Traitors die slowly in Sicily,—but they always die."

He refused to answer any questions, of course, like the others who were taken, beyond identifying the dead, and they all swore that no one had escaped, and that Tebaldo had been mistaken in saying that there had been fifteen instead of fourteen.

"But the famous Moscio?" asked San Giacinto, who had heard of the youth. "Where is he?"

"The Moscio?" The outlaw repeated the name with a blank look. "I never heard the name," he added gravely.

CHAPTER XXXVII

TEBALDO slackened his speed at last and attempted to concentrate his thoughts. Exhausted as he was by exertion and by the ever-increasing strain on his faculties, it was not easy to think at all. But his bare feet, chilled in the cold stirrups, drew his attention to the present necessity of being shod as soon as possible. He could reach Randazzo long before dawn and get into the inn by knocking and rousing the man who slept on the ground floor. He could invent some story to explain why he had ridden home on another horse. In the dark, with only a taper or a lantern, the man would not notice his bare feet, and he could get to his room in safety. After that, he did not know what he should do. He felt that if he could not get rest soon, he must fall ill. As a matter of fact, he was ill already, with the dangerous fever of the south, as the sudden chills he had lately felt would have told him at any other time.

He made up his mind that he must reach the inn; he put his horse to a canter again and got to Randazzo just as the first pallor of the dawn

threw the dark outline of Etna into stronger relief against the sky. Everything happened as he had hoped. The sleepy manservant gave him the key of the stable, and he hitched his horse in a stall, came back, entered the house, and reached his room in safety, the man not having noticed that he was barefoot.

He locked the door and almost staggered to his bed, falling upon it as he was, in his wet clothes. A moment later he was asleep.

It seemed but a moment more and he was waked by a loud knocking. He started up in one of those hideous dreams of fear, of which the whole length takes but an instant of time. The knocking was the sound of rifle-shots, and he was once more plunging down through the tangle below Camaldoli. Then he saw that it was broad daylight outside, and he heard the voice of the officer of carabinieri speaking to him from without in a friendly tone. Forgetting or not caring how he looked, he opened the door.

The grey-haired lieutenant entered. He was already shaved and dressed with his usual scrupulous neatness, but he was extremely pale, and his arm was in a black sling.

"I am sorry to disturb you," he said, "though, as it is nearly twelve o'clock, I had expected to find you up. The fact is, I should be very much obliged to you if you could make it convenient to

go to Rome — or Paris, if you please. One of the brigands escaped us last night.”

“Only one?” asked Tebaldo, mechanically.

“Only one. We suppose that it must have been the famous Moscio.”

“The Moscio?”

“We suppose so. Whoever it was, he has lost no time in telling what has happened and your share in the business. You are not safe even in the town of Randazzo, unless you will consent to go about between a couple of carabinieri like a prisoner. I am sorry to say that you had better go at once. The population is roused against you. You know what they are.”

“Yes. I know.” Tebaldo leaned against the table.

“I can protect you with soldiers,” continued the officer, his own voice weak from loss of blood. “But your position will be a very unpleasant one. I have sent for a carriage for you and will give you a strong escort, but for your own safety, as well as for the quiet of the country, I must beg you to start as soon as you can dress and get your things together. To-day you may get away quietly. To-morrow your appearance might cause something like a riot.”

“I knew how it would end,” said Tebaldo, faintly. “Very well. I will get ready.”

The lieutenant was in reality exaggerating the

danger of the man's position, though quite unintentionally. He would certainly not have been safe in such a place as Santa Vittoria, but it was extremely unlikely that he should be attacked in Randazzo, though he might very probably have been insulted in the streets.

The Moscio had in reality seen but one man with whom he had spoken before dawn, but he was the woodcutter who had chiefly supplied the outlaws with provisions during their stay in the forest of Maniace, and he had come up as usual to know if they wanted anything on that day, being as yet ignorant of the fight at Camaldoli. But as he came down, the man had met an acquaintance and had repeated the story without telling how he had learned it. Before noon the facts were known far and wide from Santa Vittoria to Randazzo, substantially as the Moscio knew that they had happened.

The feeling against Tebaldo was at once infinitely stronger than that against the carabinieri and soldiers. To a certain extent the brigands always terrorized the country, and many of the better sort of people were heartily glad to know that the band of Mauro had been finally destroyed; though they did not say so, lest some survivor should wreak vengeance on them. But there was no difference of opinion in regard to Tebaldo. It was not exactly treachery to carry people off by

force and extort a ransom from them, as the outlaws did. But to lead men who trusted him into a trap prepared for them by the troops was a betrayal which no Sicilian could forgive Tebaldo, even though it might have had some good results, and the name of Judas, which the Moscio had spoken alone in the solitude, was on every tongue.

It is of no use to waste words in trying to explain this feeling, which most people will understand. The fact was that the whole population shared it, as Tebaldo knew that they must, since the story had become known. He recognized at once that he ought to accept the officer's advice and get away as soon as he could. He would write to Aliandra from Messina, but he was sure that she must despise him now, like everyone else. To all intents and purposes he was a fugitive, as he drove out of the town, half an hour later, in a closed carriage with the ragged shades drawn down. Possibly he remembered, as he shivered in his corner beside the carabineer, how the light had fallen on Ippolito Saracinesca's face in the street of Santa Vittoria scarcely ten days earlier, how the people had cursed the innocent man, and had thrown things at him, trying to bruise him from a distance.

Another carabineer sat opposite in the carriage, and one was on the box beside the driver. Tebaldo vaguely understood that even the soldiers despised

him, but he was almost past caring what they thought. The fever was slowly gaining on him, and his nerves were utterly broken. His face was like a yellow mask, and he hung his head so that his chin rested on his breast. He reached Messina in a dream and went to the wretched hotel there. He was not able to go on to Rome that night, and a doctor who was sent for said that he had the 'perniciosa' fever.

On the following morning, in Randazzo, Aliandra was sitting alone in her room. She had heard of all that had happened. Twenty people had been to see the notary on the previous day, and the story had been repeated again and again, till she knew every word of it by heart.

She was ashamed of ever having wished to marry such a man. That was her first sensation, and it had not left her yet. Though she was strong and sensible, she had shut herself up in her own room and had cried for hours, not for Tebaldo, but with shame and anger at herself. She hated him now, far more than she had ever cared for anyone in her short life, and she was glad when she heard that he was gone, for she never wished to see him again. It was a perfectly simple state of mind. The man was a despicable traitor, in her view, and she hated herself for having ever believed in him.

Her shame at the whole thing was not her own secret. That made it worse. Her father's friends

knew very well that Tebaldo often came to the house and was in love with her, and had not been rebuffed. The lieutenant of carabinieri himself generally came once a week to pay a visit, for he liked Basili. All the townsfolk knew it. It was a reproach, and a public one, it was a blot on her good name, and she felt it all the more painfully because she had never done anything to be ashamed of.

Again and again, through the night and in the morning, the burning tears of anger at herself ran over and scalded her cheeks, and then dried as her anger rose against Tebaldo.

This morning she had just been through one of these storms of tears in the solitude of her room, when Gesualda knocked at the door. Poor, ugly Gesualda, whose innocent little sin of eating an orange on the stairs one day had started the avalanche of fate that ended in the destruction of Mauro's band, the death of Francesco Pagliuca, and the ruin of Tebaldo, would have died of horror had she known that all these things were the direct consequences of Basili's broken leg, which had brought Aliandra to Randazzo, followed by the two brothers.

She entered quietly and stupidly enough.

"Signorina," she said, "dry your eyes, for there is one who would speak with you downstairs."

"Who is it?" asked Aliandra, impatiently. "Will they ever let me alone? What does he want?"

"Do not be angry, signorina," answered the woman. "It is a young gentleman from Messina, who has a parcel for you in his hands and begs that you will kindly receive it yourself."

"A parcel from Messina? Well—" Aliandra hesitated, but her curiosity was roused. "Tell him that I will come down immediately," she concluded.

A few minutes later she descended the stairs, having plunged her face into cold water and done her best to remove the traces of her tears. She entered the front room and met a girlish looking youth with close and curling brown hair, and extremely well dressed in light grey. A rather delicate hand held out a parcel to her, as he bowed respectfully.

"I was commissioned to hand you this parcel, signorina," said the Moscio. "It is from one of your greatest admirers."

"From whom is it?" she asked quickly, as she took the heavy little package.

"That is your friend's secret. He only begs that you will open it when you are alone. It contains a little surprise for you. I thank you for your kindness in receiving me, signorina. Good morning."

He bowed and moved quickly towards the door.

“But you, signore — what is your name? I am infinitely obliged —”

“My name is Angelo Laria, signorina. Good morning.”

Before she could stop him, he had left the room, and she heard the front door shut immediately afterwards. She looked out through the closed blinds, and there was no one within sight. It was as though she had dreamed of the visitor. Then she felt the package, shook it, weighed it, began to undo it, changed her mind, and went swiftly up the stairs to her own room. It might be an ornament or a jewel, she thought, sent to the celebrated singer by an unknown admirer — possibly the well-dressed young gentleman who had brought it was himself the giver, in spite of what he said. At all events she would look at it in private. She bolted the door of her room, sat down near the window in order to have plenty of light, and opened the parcel carefully.

It contained a letter sealed, addressed to her, and folded round the black leathern sheath of Tebaldo's knife. She took the letter in one hand and the knife in the other, turning over the latter curiously. But she was too much a Sicilian not to have heard of such messages, and she guessed that the letter contained either a threat or a warning. She tore open the envelope and read the contents

eagerly. There were two large sheets, tolerably closely written in excellent handwriting, and beginning as follows:

“SIGNORINA,— We, who are beyond laws, do not betray even our enemies to the law, much less our friends. We have little, but we have honour. The man to whom this knife belonged has neither, and against him, and such as he, we warn women like yourself, who are young, beautiful, and honest. These words are not written to the incomparable artist, the matchless singer, the wonder of Sicily, and the pride of the nation. They are addressed to you—simply as Aliandra Basili, an honourable Sicilian maiden, the daughter of an honest Sicilian notary. It is known to us all that you have put your faith and trust in Tebaldo Pagliuca. Consider what is here written, your own honour, and your father’s name, and do not marry one who has betrayed his friends to death and captivity, and who, moreover, murdered his own brother with the weapon I now place in your hands. Judas was an honourable man compared with your betrothed husband, Tebaldo Pagliuca.”

Aliandra stopped at this point, read the last sentences again, and glanced at the knife she still held in one hand. With a movement of horror and disgust she threw it from her. Then she hesitated, rose, picked it up, and hid it in a drawer before she continued reading.

The letter went on to tell the story of the last four days in detail, from the time when Tebaldo had sent for the Moscio to sup with him at the inn, till Tebaldo's departure from Randazzo. Aliandra did not pause till she reached the last sentences, but there was the bright red flush of anger and shame in her cheeks. There is perhaps no such cruel shame in human nature as that a woman feels at the disgrace of the man she has accepted as husband or lover. She paused, bit her lips, and then read to the end.

"This is not an anonymous letter, signorina. I who write to, you am known as the Moscio, but many people call me Angelo Laria. I am he who by a miracle escaped from the massacre the night before last, when all my friends were dead or taken and I had not a shot left to fire. When I leave you I am going to the inn where Tebaldo Pagliuca stayed, for I will not send such a letter as this and then slink away like a thief. It is in your power, if you have read this at once, to inform the authorities and have me taken. I am not even armed. We, who have no laws, do not betray our friends, but we warn our women against such men as Tebaldo Pagliuca, and we know that they will not betray us treacherously as he did."

There was no signature, for none was necessary. There were few in Sicily who had not heard the name of the Moscio, and many strangely

romantic stories were told of him. Some may think that considering what the man was, Aliandra should have delivered him up forthwith to justice. She would as soon have stabbed her father in the back.

But gradually, as she leaned back in her chair, staring at the wall, the angry flush subsided from her cheeks and a dreamy look came into her face.

"This outlaw is at least a man and a brave one," she said to herself, as she thought of him.

The Moscio was quite safe, so far as she was concerned. She folded the letter carefully, returning it to its envelope, and then, taking the stout paper in which it had been wrapped, she opened the drawer, took the knife and rolled it up with the letter again, tying it, as she had received it. After that she took sealing-wax and sealed it with the little emblem of Sicily which she carried on a thin chain with other trinkets—the three legs growing out of a human head, for the three capes of the triangular island.

Tebaldo had disappeared without a word, and she naturally believed that he had gone to Rome to escape the vengeance of the Moscio and of any friends the latter might have. Aliandra was sure he must know that she would never see him again, for though many of the details written by the outlaw were new to her, besides the main fact of Francesco's murder, the fact of the betrayal of

the band by Tebaldo was public property. He had gone to Rome without so much as attempting to defend himself.

And now she had in her hands the proofs that Tebaldo had killed his brother, or what she believed to be proofs, though the law might have thought differently. She had, at least, the certainty, for it did not enter her head that the Moscio could be trying to deceive her.

Yet she would not take these proofs to the deputy prefect, nor show them to her father. She was not a detective. The idea of giving the murderer up was repugnant to her, though in a less degree than the thought of informing against the Moscio himself. She wondered what Tebaldo would do next.

Thinking it over, she came to the rather unexpected conclusion that he had gone to Rome in order to marry the American heiress at once. At first this seemed wild, but she grew accustomed to the thought in a few moments, and it impressed her. There would be much in favour of the plan, if he could carry it out. Once married to Miss Slayback and her millions, Tebaldo could leave Italy for ever and spend the rest of his life as he pleased. The mafia could not pursue him to a foreign country. Even in Rome he would be comparatively safe, for Rome, she thought, was a very civilized capital, and one man could not easily

wait for another in the Villa Borghese as he could at the turning of a lonely Sicilian road.

The more she thought of it, the more certain she felt that he meant to marry Miss Slayback. All the details of her last interview with Francesco came back vividly. Knowing, now, that Tebaldo had killed him, she was more willing than before to believe everything Francesco had said. Tebaldo had loved her, in a fierce and brutal way, but he had never meant to marry her at all. He had meant something else. Her cheeks burned once more, and her eyes flashed dangerously. He should not marry Miss Slayback, either, she thought.

Then she reflected a little more calmly on her own position, and she decided to leave Randazzo at once. After what had happened, she could not stay in her native town, ashamed to show her face in the streets. Even the outlaw had known that she was engaged to marry Tebaldo Pagliuca. The very children would point at her.

Her father was much better, and she communicated her decision to him. He was very grim and silent about it all, but he thought she was wise. He should soon be on his legs again; at all events, she had helped him to get over the most tiresome part of his recovery from the accident, and he now attended to his business regularly with his clerk and received his clients in his room. Aliandra

made her preparations and left on the following day, in the very carriage which had taken Tebaldo to the station of Piedimonte. And she, too, had the old carriage closed and drew down the ragged blinds. The boys in the street did not know who was inside, but they had heard how Tebaldo had driven away, and seeing the blinds down, they ran along by the door, yelling in derision.

“Another betrayer! Another Judas! Curses on the souls of his dead!” they cried.

The coachman lashed at them with his whip, and they fell behind, but Aliandra had understood, and her eyes flashed and the burning blush came back.

She had telegraphed to her aunt, and the Signora Barbuzzi met her at the station in Messina. They reached Rome on the second day, a little less than a fortnight after they had left, and early in the afternoon.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MARIA CAROLINA was not exactly insane, but she was entirely unbalanced, and seemed to have no sane judgment in ordinary matters. Her first outbursts of grief had subsided into a profound religious melancholy, and she insisted upon being taken to a convent in which she might end her days in peace. She seemed utterly regardless of the fact that her daughter would be left alone until her surviving brother came back, if he ever returned at all, and that such a man, even as she knew him, was no fit guardian for a young girl. The doctors said that in all probability, if she were not allowed to do what she wished, she would really go mad, in her present state. They suggested that she should retire to one of the convents where ladies were received who wished to go into a religious retreat, and that one of the Sisters of the Bon Secours should obtain permission to live with Vittoria for a few days until her brother arrived.

Vittoria, worn out with anxiety and sorrow, did not know how to face this new difficulty. Miss Lizzie Slayback insisted that she should come and

stay with her and her aunt at the hotel. After a little hesitation, she accepted, for it seemed the only solution of the difficulty. The American girl had become sincerely attached to her Italian friend, and felt herself drawn to Vittoria for the sake of having been on the point of marrying Tebaldo, a state of mind which is natural to some characters and utterly unnatural to others. It was a generous impulse, at all events.

Vittoria went with her mother to the convent and helped her to install herself, and on the same afternoon she moved with her maid to the Hotel Bristol. She was like a lovely shadow.

"I am so tired," she said, when she sat down at last beside Miss Lizzie.

"Rest, dear, rest," answered the American girl, drawing the weary head down to her shoulder.

As the hours went by, and she felt the freedom of not being obliged to go back to the sadness of her mother's society, Vittoria revived a little. But her life was almost more than she could bear. The papers had been full of the capture of Mauro's band, and of her brother's share in it, for the story had spread like wildfire over Sicily. Even the Roman papers made scathing allusions to Tebaldo's possible relations with the brigands, and while congratulating the government on its victory, made sarcastic enquiries into the state of the betrayer's conscience. It was indeed hard for

Vittoria to bear. She had no news of Tebaldo himself, who seemed to have disappeared mysteriously. Her mother had practically abandoned her in her selfish and half-insane sorrow. She felt herself utterly alone in the world.

Orsino gravely read the articles in the papers, and wished that he could silence them for Vittoria's sake. Had there ever been so much as a mention of her name, or even of her mother's, he would have taken active measures to do so. But the editors were careful never to allude to Tebaldo's family, and it was out of the question to hinder them from speaking of him as they chose. So far as Orsino knew, the man was quite able to defend himself.

Sant' Ilario read the accounts aloud to his father and to Corona. Sometimes Ippolito listened, but Orsino always made an excuse for leaving the room, preferring to read the news for himself.

There was a perpetual subdued anxiety in the great household, on Ippolito's account, with an eager expectation that in the course of the present events the mystery of Francesco's death should be cleared up. Their friends looked upon the affair very much as though it had taken place in Africa or the South Seas, for Sicily seems very remote to Roman society. They laughed at the idea that Ippolito could really ever be brought to trial. Even the Minister of Justice, who was a friend of

Sant' Ilario's, smiled and said that the law had means of putting off the trial for a long time in order that satisfactory evidence might be obtained. But no such evidence was forthcoming. The judge who had heard the case in Messina had been to Santa Vittoria, but had met with the most complete substantiation of Tebaldo's own story. He had not even thought of causing the grating under the altar to be opened. Nothing new transpired, and Ippolito resolutely held his tongue. In order to avoid being questioned by his many acquaintances, he saw as few people as he could, and spent much time over his music in Orsino's room. The two brothers were as fond of each other as ever, but when they were together they were much more silent than formerly. The secret preoccupation of each conflicted with that of the other, and the peace between them depended upon silence for its security.

Nor did anyone in the household know that Orsino had seen Vittoria several times at Mrs. Slayback's, still less that the American lady and her niece always managed to leave the two alone together for a while on such occasions. Orsino was determined that nothing should come between him and Vittoria, but at the present juncture it was impossible for him to insist upon his family's consent to his marriage.

Vittoria, on her side, had given up all hope,

though her love gained upon her sorrows in the struggle for her soul. She was too lonely not to love her love for its companionship, too weary not to love Orsino for his strength, and yet too desolate to believe that happiness could wait for her while the cruel hours and days crawled slowly on.

It had seemed easy long ago—a month or a little more, at most—when Orsino had first gone to Sicily. It had seemed possible when he had come back that first time, even though he had killed her own brother in self-defence. But there was no more possibility now. She felt that this was the end of her race. Some fearful thing must happen to Tebaldo, and she should be left alone, the last of the long and evil line of the Corleone. It would be better for her, too, to go back to the convent, to the dear old nuns who knew her and had loved her and would take her back as a sister, now, to end her days in peace and innocence and devotion. Her name should be forgotten, and while she lived she could pray that the evil of it might be forgiven and the remembrance of it blotted out among men.

Once or twice she had spoken in this way to Orsino, but he had stopped her suddenly and almost roughly. Come what might, he meant to marry her, and he would. That was all he said, but he meant it, and she had moments of belief when she heard the words and saw his face.

He admitted, when she pressed him, that neither his father nor his mother would at present give their consent, and that there was little to choose between them, and that they were people whose minds being once made up, would not easily change. And Vittoria sadly answered that they were right, and that she should feel and act as Corona did, were she in Corona's place. Yet still Orsino smiled gravely and said that they should not hinder him at the last, for that he, too, had made up his mind, and that he was their son and like them, and could be as stubborn as they. Vittoria could not say that Orsino had once wavered in his determination since that night when he had kissed her on the bridge outside the ballroom. He was always the same, and it was small wonder that her weariness should find rest in his strength. But when he was gone, her courage sank again.

She was seated alone one afternoon in Mrs. Slayback's drawing-room. The two ladies were out, but Vittoria would not drive with them in their big open carriage, to meet her old acquaintances and to feel that she was pointed out as the sister of Tebaldo Pagliuca, who had betrayed Mauro and his band. She went for little walks in the morning with Miss Lizzie, before it was hot, and sometimes in the afternoon she took a closed cab and drove to the convent to see her mother. To-day she was at home, and she had come into the draw-

ing-room and established herself in the corner of a sofa, with a book, trying to read. But she could not care for what the book said, and the volume dropped upon her lap, while her head fell back and the low sunlight filtered through the blinds and gilded her brown hair, leaving her sad young face all in the shadow.

Suddenly the door opened wide, and one of the servants of the hotel announced a visitor, in a pompous tone.

"The Signorina Basili!" he said, waited for Aliandra to enter, and he closed the door.

Aliandra came in swiftly and stood before Vittoria, who half rose from her seat, startled by the singer's sudden appearance. Aliandra held something in her hand. She had never seen Vittoria, and the sunlight made the girl's hair look fair. She had ordered the servant to show her to Miss Slayback's drawing-room without announcing her, and she naturally took Vittoria for Miss Lizzie. Her handsome face was faintly flushed with anger and excitement, and her dark eyes gleamed.

"I have brought you this," she said, holding out the Moscio's parcel, "from the man who has deceived us both, who wished to marry you and ruin me, who has come back to marry you now —"

"Who? What?" asked Vittoria, half frightened, but mechanically taking the parcel.

"Tebaldo Pagliuca," answered Aliandra, too

much excited to notice that Vittoria spoke in Italian with an Italian's accent. "Tebaldo Pagliuca, who betrayed his friends the outlaws to death, Tebaldo Pagliuca, who is trying to marry you for your fortune, Tebaldo Pagliuca, who killed his own brother Francesco on the steps of the altar with the knife that is in that package —"

"Merciful God!" The young girl's voice rang breaking through the room, as she sank back.

"Tebaldo Pagliuca, who confessed the crime to the priest," continued Aliandra, working herself into a fury, "who accused the priest of the murder, knowing that he would die with the secret rather than betray a confession — Tebaldo Pagliuca, the traitor, the betrayer, the false accuser, the murderer! The story is there, with the knife, in the paper — read it, and give him his answer when he comes to-day to kiss your hands —"

"Mercy of Heaven! Mercy of God!" moaned Vittoria, still too strong to faint or not to hear and understand every word.

Aliandra believed that she had done what she had come to do. She had foiled Tebaldo effectually and for ever in any attempt he might make to marry the American heiress. With a glance at the girl's bent head, and at the soft, brown hair that looked so fair in the flecks of sunshine, she turned and left the room as quickly as she had entered it.

Vittoria started as she heard the door close, looked up, and then glanced at the package in her hand. She did not quite remember what she did after that, till she found herself locked into her own room, breaking the violet seals from the brown paper, cutting the string with her nail scissors, tearing the stout paper to pieces with her little hands, her heart beating with horror and her eyes already frightened by the expectation of the knife they were to see. She saw it, a moment later, and then her heart stood still, for she had seen it many times in Tebaldo's room, during that winter, and once she had borrowed it of him to cut a strong cord from a parcel.

Then came the letter, and the long and painful reading of the hideous tale. She spent a terrible half hour, and then she sat still for a long time, and her face was almost restful. At last she rose, quite calm and decided, and began to dress herself to go out. In a quarter of an hour she was ready, and she went downstairs alone and told the porter to get her a cab.

"Palazzo Saracinesca," she said to the cabman, "and drive under the gate!"

She went up the great staircase and asked for Corona. The footman hesitated to say whether the Princess would receive or not. Vittoria fixed her eyes on him and spoke quietly in a tone he understood.

"Be good enough to take me to the Princess's room," she said. "The matter is urgent."

She followed the man through the long succession of state drawing-rooms till he knocked at a side door, and immediately opened it inwards.

Corona was at her table, writing a note. She looked up quickly, bending her brows, and rose rather formally. She had always liked Vittoria for herself, but she had good cause to hate her name, and she had avoided the possibility of meeting the lonely girl of late. Vittoria went forward and spoke first.

"I should not have come to you for a small matter," she said. "But I have come to make a reparation."

"There is none to make," answered Corona. "You have done nothing—" She paused, not understanding.

"You shall see. Will you sit down? It may take some time to explain—or, rather, to read. There is only one question which I must ask you first. Has Don Ippolito been acquitted or not?"

Corona's face darkened.

"He has not," she answered. "He is at liberty on San Giacinto's security."

"Here are the proofs of his innocence," said Vittoria, simply, as she produced her package, and laid it on Corona's lap.

Corona opened her eyes in surprise, and her expression changed.

"My brother Tebaldo did it," continued Vittoria. "He forced your son, as a priest, to hear his confession, because Don Ippolito surprised him in the church. Then he accused him of the murder, knowing that he would keep the secret."

Corona stared, realized what the girl meant, and suddenly grasped her wrist, looking into her face. She saw the truth there, but Vittoria understood the doubt.

"When you have read, you will understand better," said the young girl, pointing to the package.

Corona said nothing, but her fingers were quick to find the letter. Vittoria rose softly and went to the window and looked out. Her hands rested on the cold stone sill and twitched nervously from time to time, but she would not turn round. She knew that what was shame and horror to her, was the joy of heaven to the mother of the accused man. Corona read in silence, intently, quickly, almost desperately.

She was a generous woman. When she had finished, and the weight had fallen from her heart at last, she rose and went to Vittoria. The girl heard her step and turned. Corona was holding out both hands.

"What shall I do to make you know how grateful I am?" she asked.

"What should you do?" asked Vittoria, sadly. "It was justice, so I came at once. The great singer — the Basili — came into the room an hour ago. I was alone. She took me for Miss Slayback, with whom I am staying, and before I could speak she had told the truth and given me the package and was gone. So I brought it to you. I trust you to spare my poor brother if you can. Keep the secret, if you can, now that you know the truth. Perhaps something else may prove Don Ippolito innocent, long before the trial. But if nothing else will do — why then, you have his innocence in your hands."

"Where is he?" asked Corona. "Where is your brother?"

"I do not know. It is several days since he has telegraphed. He never writes. The Basili spoke as though he were in Rome, but I do not think he is. I will go home, please. I am a little tired. You will keep the secret if you can, will you not?"

"Yes. No one shall know it unless it is necessary. But you, child —"

She put her arm round Vittoria, for the girl looked shadowy and faint, as she leaned against the table by the window. Vittoria straightened herself, and opened and shut her eyes once or twice as though waking.

"There is nothing the matter," she said rather

proudly. "I am very well. I am glad that you are happy."

"You have given me back my life," answered Corona. "Some day—but there are no thanks for such things."

Vittoria began to go towards the door. She wanted no thanks, yet somehow she had hoped that Corona would speak differently, remembering how she had once been left by her with Orsino in that very room. The Princess walked with her to the hall.

"I shall not forget this, my dear," she said, almost solemnly, as she pressed the passive little hand. "I shall come and see you soon."

As Vittoria drove back to the Piazza Barberini, she felt as though the very desolation of loneliness were beside her in the shabby little cab. But Corona had never been a woman of many words; and she meant more than she said when she told Vittoria that she should not forget.

CHAPTER XXXIX

CORONA regretted the promise of secrecy which Vittoria had obtained from her, as soon as she found herself alone and able to think over the situation calmly. She had no secrets from her husband, and few of any kind, and it was hard to keep silence when Giovanni discussed Ippolito's position and the possibilities of obtaining the evidence necessary to clear Ippolito. She had, indeed, the sort of satisfaction which a woman feels all the more keenly when she feels it alone, with the certainty that everyone else will soon know what she knows, for she saw that Ippolito had behaved with almost heroic constancy. But she would soon begin to long for the moment when others should see that he was a hero.

Being naturally a calm woman, and somewhat reserved, even with her own family, her face did not betray her at first. Yet she hardly dared to look at Ippolito that evening, lest her happiness should break like light from her eyes.

Her difficulty was a considerable one, however, and puzzled her at first. In her own room she

read and re-read the Moscio's letter, and her maturer judgment told her what neither Aliandra nor Vittoria had understood in their impetuosity. The law would look upon this so-called evidence as a piece of vengeance on the part of a brigand, and would attach little value to it. Why, the law would ask, since the brigand professed to hold proofs that could ruin his enemy, had he not sent them to the carabinieri? The answer must take the very unsatisfactory form of a dissertation on Sicilian character in general, and on that of the Moscio in particular; whereas, while he was still at large, his character could be but an unknown quantity. It might be proved, of course, that the knife had belonged to Tebaldo. But it would be hard to show how the Moscio had come by it. To demonstrate Ippolito's innocence, something more was necessary.

Corona made up her mind that she would see Tebaldo himself and force him to a confession of his crime. It did not occur to her to fear such a meeting nor even to hesitate, after she had once made up her mind. The difficulty lay in finding the man immediately. She did not believe that Vittoria had deceived her in saying that she did not know where her brother might be, but she supposed that he would soon come to Rome, and decided to wait for him. She sent frequently to enquire at the house where the Corleone had lived.

The servants knew nothing. She wrote a note to Vittoria at Mrs. Slayback's, but Vittoria had no news.

Corona wrote to the Minister of Justice. She knew him very well, and told him that in the matter of the accusation against her son she wished to communicate with Don Tebaldo Pagliuca, but could not find out where he was. To her surprise the Minister's answer gave her the information she wished. Tebaldo, said the note, was dangerously ill in Messina at a certain hotel. Owing to the strong feeling which existed against him in Sicily, it had been thought necessary to protect him, and the government was, therefore, kept constantly apprised of his condition through the office of the prefect of Messina. He was very ill indeed, and was not expected to recover.

The information was clear, but the thought that Tebaldo might die without having cleared Ippolito was anything but reassuring. Corona's instinct was to start at once, but she remembered her promise to Vittoria, and did not see how she could make such a journey without informing her husband and giving some explanation of her conduct. She went to his room as soon as she knew what she must do.

"Giovanni," she said, "I wish you to go to Sicily with me at once. I must go to Messina."

Giovanni looked at her sharply in surprise.

"Are you ill, my dear?" he enquired. "Is it for a change? Is anything the matter?"

Corona laughed, for she had never been ill in her life. The mere idea seemed ludicrous to her.

"Can you imagine me ill?" she asked. "No. I will tell you what I can. Someone has told me something, making me promise not to tell anyone else —"

"Your informant is a woman, dear," observed Giovanni, smiling.

"Never mind who it was. But from what was told me I know that if I can go to Messina I can get evidence which will clear Ippolito completely. So I came to you."

"Are you positively sure?" asked Sant' Ilario. "It is a long journey."

"We shall travel together," answered Corona, as though that answered every objection.

"I should like it very much. Do you wish to start to-day?"

"Yes. The man is said to be dying at a hotel in Messina."

It amused them both to make a mystery of going away together, though it was not the first time that they had done such a thing, and Sant' Ilario's presence lightened the anxiety which Corona still felt as to the result of the journey.

They reached Messina at evening and drove to the wretched hotel where Tebaldo lay dying, for

there was no other in the city, in which they could have lodged at all.

Half an hour later Corona entered the sick man's room. The sister who was nursing him rose in surprise as the Princess entered, and laid her finger on her lips. Tebaldo appeared to be asleep.

"Is he better?" whispered Corona.

But the sister shook her head and pointed to his face. It was like a yellow shadow on the white pillow, in the soft light of the single candle, before which the nurse had set a book upright on the table, as a shade.

Corona stood still by the side of the bed and looked down at what remained of the man who had done such terrible deeds during the last month. The colourless lips were parted and displayed the sharp, white teeth, and the half-grown beard gave something wolfish to the face. The lids were not quite closed and showed the whites of the eyes. Corona felt suddenly that he was going to die in his unconsciousness without speaking. Even if he revived for a moment, he might not understand her. The candle flickered, and she thought the lids quivered.

"He is dying," she said in a low voice. "But he must speak to me before he dies."

"Are you his mother, madam?" asked the sister, in a whisper.

"No!" Corona's great eyes blazed upon the nun's face. Then she spoke gently again. "I am the mother of the priest he falsely accused. Before he dies he must tell the truth."

A faint smile moved the wasted lips, and the lids slowly opened. Then he spoke, almost naturally.

"You have come to see me die. I understand."

"No," said Corona, speaking clearly and distinctly. "I have come to hear the truth about my son, from your own lips, as I know it from others —"

The yellow face shivered and the eyes stared. There was a convulsive effort of the head to rise from the pillow.

"Who told you?" The question gurgled in the throat.

"Your sister told me —"

"I have no sister." The head fell back again, and the twisting smile took possession of the lips.

"Vittoria is your sister. You are Tebaldo Pagliuca." Corona bent down towards him anxiously, for she feared that he was wandering, and that the truth must escape her at last.

"Oh no! Vittoria is not my sister. I remember when she was brought to Camaldoli by the outlaws when I was a boy."

Corona bent lower still and stared into the open

eyes. Their expression was quite natural and quiet, though the voice was faint now.

"It is better that someone should know," it said. "I know, because I saw her brought. The brigands stole her from her nurse's arms. Vittoria is the daughter of Fornasco. They frightened my father and mother—they brought the child at night—in trying to get a ransom they were all taken, but none of them would tell—there is a paper of my father's, sealed—in Rome, among my things. He always said that we might be accused, though they managed to make people believe it was my mother's child, for fear of the brigands—I cannot tell you all that. You will find it in the papers."

The eyelids closed again, but the lips still moved. Corona bent down.

"Water," said the parched whisper.

They gave him drink quickly, but he could hardly swallow it. He was going fast.

"Call the doctor," said Corona to the nurse. "He is dying. Has he seen a priest? Call my husband!"

"I had sent for a priest," answered the nurse, leaving the room hastily.

For many minutes Tebaldo gasped painfully for breath. In his suffering Corona raised the pillow with his head upon it, tenderly and carefully.

"You are dying," she said softly. "Commend your soul — pray for forgiveness!"

It was horrible to her belief to see him dying unconfessed in his many sins.

"Quickly — lose no time!" she urged. "Think of God — think of one prayer! It may be too late in a moment —"

"Too late?" he cried suddenly, with a revival of strength. "Too late? But I shall catch him on the hill! Gallop, mare, gallop — there, there! So! We shall do it yet. I am lighter than old Basili! One more stretch! There he is! Gallop, mare, gallop, for I shall catch him on the hill!"

One hand grasped the sheet like a bridle, the other patted it encouragingly. Corona stared and listened breathlessly, half in horror, half in expectation. She did not hear the door open, as someone came in. The dying man raved on.

"What? Down? He has killed his horse? It shied at the woman in black! He will try the church door — on, mare, gallop! We shall catch him there!"

A hideous glare of rage and hatred was in the burning eyes. The twisted and discoloured lips set themselves like blue steel. The right hand struck out wildly. Then the eyes fixed themselves upon the young priest who stood beside Corona, and whom she had not seen till then.

Tebaldo sat up as though raised by a spring,

suddenly. He grasped the priest's ready hands and looked up into his face, seeing only him, though the doctor and the nurse were close by.

"I confess to Almighty God," he began —

And word for word, as he had confessed to Ippolito alone in the little church, he went through the whole confession, quickly, clearly, in a loud voice, holding the priest's hands.

Who should say that it was not a true confession now? That at the last, the dream of terror did not change to the reality of remorse? The priest's voice spoke the words of forgiveness, and he bent down above Corona's kneeling figure, that the dying man might hear.

But before the last merciful word was spoken, the last of the Corleone lay stone dead on his pillow. He was buried beside his two brothers in the little cemetery of Santa Vittoria, for the sister had promised him that, when he knew that he was dying.

And outside the gate, when it was all over, a figure in black came and knelt down upon the rough, broken stones, and two white hands grasped the painted iron rails, and a low voice came from beneath the little black shawl.

"Mother of God, three black crosses! Mother of God, three black crosses!"

And there were three black crosses, side by side.

CHAPTER XL

It might have been a long and difficult matter to establish Vittoria's identity, if Maria Carolina had been really insane, as it had been feared that she might be. She was beyond further suffering, perhaps, when the third of her sons was dead, but her mind was clear enough under the intense religious melancholy that had settled upon her in her grief. The fact of her having been willing and anxious to leave Vittoria at such a time now explained itself. The girl was not her daughter, and in the intensity of her sorrow the bereaved mother felt that she was a stranger, if not a burden. Yet she kept the secret, out of a sort of fear that even after eighteen years the revelation of it might bring about some unimaginably dreadful consequence to herself, and as though the Duca di Fornasco could still accuse her of having helped to steal his child, by receiving her from the brigands.

The fact was that the outlaws had terrified the Corleone at the time, threatening them with total destruction if they refused to conceal the infant.

They were poor and lived in an isolated neighbourhood, more or less in fear of their lives, at a time when brigandage was the rule, and when the many bands that existed in the island were under the general direction of the terrible Leone. They had yielded and had kept the secret with Sicilian reticence. Tebaldo alone had been old enough to partly understand the truth, but his father had told him the whole story before dying, and had left him a clearly written account of it, in case of any future difficulty. But Maria Carolina was alive still, and sane, and she told the truth clearly and connectedly to a lawyer, for she was glad to sever her last tie with the world, and glad, perhaps, that the stolen child should go back to her own people after all. Among her possessions were the clothes and tiny ornaments the infant had worn.

Vittoria's first sensation when she knew the truth was that of a captive led into the open air after years of confinement in a poisonous air.

She had been the daughter of a race of ill fame, fatherless, and all but motherless. Her three brothers had come to evil ends, one by one. She had been left alone in the world, the last representative of what so many called 'the worst blood in Italy.' She had been divided from the man she loved by a twofold bloodshed and by all the horror of her last surviving brother's crimes. Many and

many a time she had stared into her mirror for an hour at night, not pleased by her own delicate loveliness, but asking herself, with heartbroken wonder, how it was possible that she could be the daughter of such a mother, the sister of such brothers, the grandchild of traitors and betrayers to generations of wickedness, back into the dim past. She had never been like them, nor felt like them, not acted as they did, yet it had seemed mad, if not wicked, to doubt that she was one of them. And each morning, meeting them all again and living with them, there had come the shock of opposition between her inheritance of honour and their inborn disposition to treachery and crime.

And now, it was not true. There was not one drop of their blood in her veins. There was not in her one taint of all that line of wickedness. It had all been a mistake and a dream and an illusion of fate, and she awoke in the morning and was free — free to face the world, to face Corona Saracinesca, to marry Orsino, without so much as a day of mourning for those who had been called her brothers.

The fresh young blood came blushing back to the delicate cheeks, and the radiance of life's spring played on the fair young head.

"How beautiful you are!" exclaimed Miss Liz-zie, throwing her arms round her.

And Vittoria blushed again, and her eyes glistered with sheer, unbounded happiness.

"But I shall never know what to call you," laughed Miss Lizzie.

"I am Vittoria still," answered the other. "But I am Vittoria Spinelli—and I. come of very respectable people!" She laughed happily. "I am related to all kinds of respectable people! There is my father, first. He is on his way to see me—and I have a brother—a real brother, to be proud of. And I am the cousin of Taquisara of Guardia—but I am Vittoria still!"

Rome went half mad over the story, for the Romans had all been inclined to like Vittoria for her own sake while distrusting those who had composed her family. The instinct of an old and conservative society is very rarely wrong in such matters. The happy ending of the tragedy of the Corleone was a sincere relief to everyone; and many who had known the Duca di Fornasco in the days when his infant daughter had been carried off and had seen how his whole life had been saddened during eighteen years by the cruel loss, rejoiced in the vast joy of his later years. For he had many friends, and was a man honoured and loved by those who knew him.

"I have always believed that I should find you, my dear child," he said, when his eyes had cleared and he could see Vittoria through the dazzling

happiness of the first meeting. "But I have often feared to find you, and I never dared to hope that I should find you what you are."

It seemed to her that the very tone of his voice was like her own, as his brown eyes were like hers.

And later, he took Orsino's hand and laid it in his daughter's and pressed the two together.

"You loved more wisely than you knew," he said. "But I know how bravely you loved, when you would not give her up, nor yield to anyone. Your father will not refuse to take my daughter from my hands, I think."

"He will be as proud to take her as I am," said Orsino.

"Or as I am to give her to such a man as you."

So Orsino was married at last, and this tale comes to its happy end. For he was happy, and his people took his wife to themselves as one of them, and loved her for her own sake as well as for his; and they loved her, too, for the many troubles she had so bravely borne, under the disgrace of a name not her own. But neither were her sorrows hers, any more.

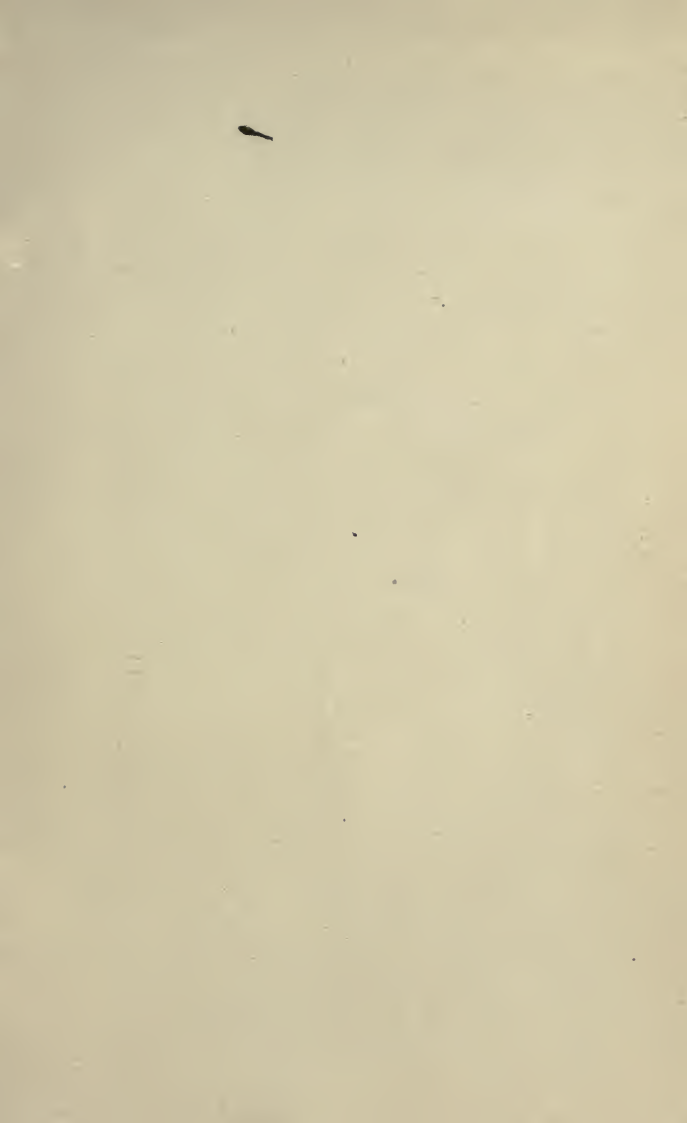
"Such things can only happen in Italy," said Mrs. Slayback, after the wedding.

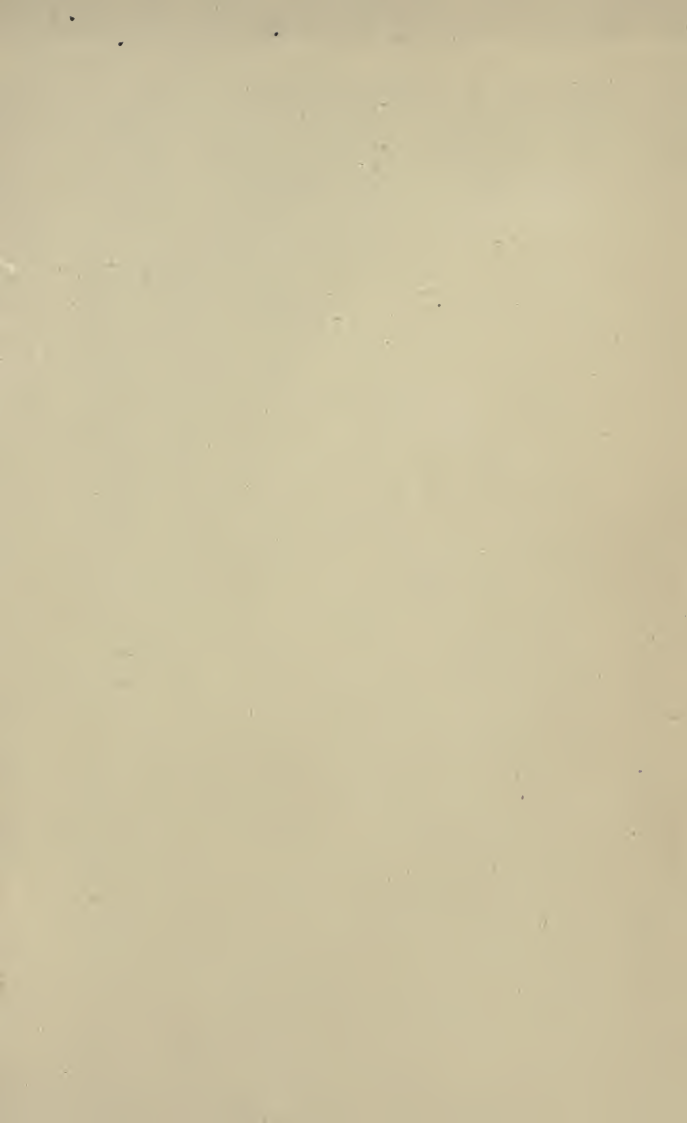
"I am glad that nothing worse happened," answered her niece, thoughtfully. "To think that I might have married that man! To think that I cared for him! But I always felt that Vittoria

was not his sister. If I ever marry, I shall marry an American."

She laughed, though there was a little ache left in her heart. But she knew that it would not last long, for she had not been very desperately in earnest, after all.

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